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THE WHITE HERMIT.

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Benjamin Alder

1872



2 MORRICO

THE
WHITE HERMIT;
OR,
THE UNKNOWN FOE
A ROMANCE OF THE LAKES AND WOODS.

BY W. J. HAMILTON,

Author of the following Dime Novels:

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THE WHITE HERMIT.

CHAPTER I.

THE LADY OF THE LAKE.

"TAKE that, you obstinate scoundrel?" shouted an angry voice.

A splash in the water disturbed the silence about a wooded lake, in the midst of wild and beautiful scenery. Such a lake as those of that romantic chain in central New York, but which, under the axes of the sturdy pioneer, have lost much of their picturesque character. The surface was covered by a host of loons, divers and geese, while here and there a stately crane stalked through the reeds along the banks, stooping now and then to seize a water-snake, wriggling by. A small stream of pure bright water poured down a mountain gorge and lost itself in the placid waters of the lake.

The splash in the water caused the loons and divers to disappear as if by magic beneath the tranquil surface, and the next moment a man's head appeared above the element into which he had plunged. He blew the water from his mouth, turned a puzzled and angry face toward the shore, and swam inward. Just then another man appeared upon the bank above, flushed and angry, muttering curses against the man in the water.

"What did ye do that fur?" gasped the involuntary bather, as his feet struck bottom, and his head and shoulders stood out a few inches from the surface of the water. "Do you think I'm going to stand it?"

"You just come ashore and I'll chuck you in again, you born idiot," replied the man on the bank.

"What did I do?" whined the man in the water. "Come, don't be violent, Capt'in Larry. I won't say it ag'in."

"Then come out. But remember, you are upon your good behavior."

"I won't forgit," replied the unfortunate bather. "You're so darned quick with your hands that a man don't have half a chance with you. Dot rot a man that's got such a temper as you! I wouldn't have it for all the world."

"If Hungry Bill don't hurry out he won't get out at all," said the man called Captain Larry, coming further out upon the bank."

Hungry Bill obeyed quickly, in evident fear of the threat, and climbed the low bank of the lake, shaking himself like a Newfoundland dog when emerging from the water. He was a broad-shouldered, lean, white-haired man, perhaps twenty-five years of age, with a pair of legs which were marvels of length and thinness. He was dressed in a greasy suit of homespun, which had once been green, but which age and use had robbed of its original color, until it appeared to be of a dirty brown. His tailor could not have been an artist, for the long arms of this specimen protruded at least six inches below the sleeves of the coat, and a section of filthy stockings appeared below, while a yawning gulf displayed itself between the waist-coat and unmentionables. Further adorned by a tattered pair of moccasins, and a coon-skin cap of dubious look, "Hungry Bill Epps" stood confessed.

His companion was a man a year or two older than himself, the beau ideal of a forest ranger. He wore the neat uniform of the Colonial Rifles—a corps much esteemed for soldierly qualities—with the exception of the cap; which was, like that of his companion, of coon-skin, with the difference in favor of cleanliness, and having three barred tails upon the side, while Hungry Bill's cap displayed one dejected appendage, limp and ragged. A look at the face of the soldier would have been sufficient for any man of honor, for it was a face to command esteem—open, frank and handsome. His hair, worn long after the fashion of the day, was suffered to fall unrestrained upon his shoulders in dark, curling masses. He wore mustaches, of a rich, dark color, and when he smiled revealed a line of white teeth which added to the charm of his face. His figure was perfection, just above the middle hight, straight as a cedar, with long, sinewy arms and broad shoulders. A black belt

enircled his waist, in which a pair of handsome pistols were thrust, beside a long, silver-hilted dagger. He wore also a short cut-and-thrust sword, with a richly-chased scabbard, and hilt like the dagger. In his right hand, the butt resting on the ground, he held a heavy rifle.

"Now, Hungry Bill," said the young soldier, "listen to me, and see that you pay due heed to my words. Do you know any thing of a stranger, said to lead the life of a recluse upon an island in the lake yonder?"

"Capt'in Larry—" began Hungry Bill.

"I believe I shall have to give you another souse," said Larry. "What makes you hang fire in that way?"

"Cause I've got *principles!*!" roared Bill. "Cause I've give my word, and swore by the big horn spoon I wouldn't take nobody to the island, nor tell 'em a thing about the island. Now, see here, Capt'in Larry Austen, I've thought many a time I'd part comp'ny with you and I find no time so good as the present. Let's agree to quit."

"In other words you propose to discharge me from your service?" said Captain Austen, laughing.

"Leastways in a contrary sense," replied Hungry Bill. "You let the island alone, can't you? You ain't got no call to go thar, I opinionate."

"But, I propose to go there this very day. And further, I propose that you shall take me there in your canoe. What do you mean by this nonsense? I know as well as you do that some one inhabits the island, and do you think I would go there to do them harm, you blockhead?"

"Who said there was anybody thar?" growled Hungry Bill.

"*You did.*"

"*I didn't.*"

"*I say you did.*"

"*And I say you lie!*"

Captain Austen made a bound at Bill and grasped him by the shoulder, while he uttered a cry of dismay, and clasped his arms around a small tree which grew upon the bank. Austen tugged at him in vain, for nothing would make him loose his hold. As the captain was pulling at him with might and main, Bill's strength suddenly gave way, and both men went down into the clear water of the lake with a resounding

splash. The *contretemps* was so sudden, and the retribution so just, that even in the act of falling, Captain Austen laughed aloud. The laugh was brought to a sudden termination by a rush of cold water. He released his hold of Hungry Bill, and stood up as soon as he could, and the pair stood facing each other in about three feet of cold water, two of the most ridiculous looking objects in the good colony of New York. As they stood there, a merry laugh sounded in their ears, and a boat shot out of a little sheltered cove near at hand, and passed within a few yards of them, the occupant singing a merry song, evidently reflecting upon the unfortunate predicament of the captain. Austen turned, and saw the boat not twenty yards away.

"Ha! ha! ha!" rung out the sweet, clear voice. "The biter is bit! Remember the old proverb, *mon beau capitaine*."

"The deuce!" muttered the captain. "Bill, who is that?"

But the oracle was mute. Climbing out of the water, he sat down on the bank, looking at the boat, which lay lightly upon the surface of the lake, not moving except as the slight wind touched it.

"A pair of impromptu bathers," cried the occupant of the boat, turning her face toward the shore. "Alas, poor gentlemen! I fear you are very wet."

"Madame," said Austen, "I shall esteem it the greatest pleasure of my life if this wetting shall give me the great honor of your acquaintance."

"But, unfortunately," said the lady, "it will not do anything of the kind. I do not propose to make myself acquainted with you, and I already have your name, as you see."

Austen looked hard at the boat and said nothing. A woman, and one evidently young, occupied the light craft. She was dressed in a garb suited to a forest life, although it was of rich material. A sort of kirtle, of strong blue broadcloth, reached nearly to the knee, set out by skirts with a red border, which showed below the kirtle and reached to the knee. A pair of Turkish trowsers were fastened at the ankle by small silver buckles, and her feet were covered by dainty moccasins, worked with a skillful hand. Her hair was of a rich brown color, and she wore a Scotch bonnet of blue cloth, with a plaid border, which gave her a jaunty air that was quite enchanting.

Her hands were small and delicate, though somewhat browned by exposure to the sun. Her face was cut in a beautiful mold, firm lips, a delicate mouth, and cheeks in which the faintest peach-bloom was revealed, while her teeth were like pearls. Austen stood spell-bound, gazing at this beautiful girl, and wondering from whence she came, while Hungry Bill sat upon the bank, whistling, and eying the lady furtively.

"Bill Epps," said the lady, suddenly addressing him.

Bill started as if a shot had struck him. "Yes, miss," he said. "I didn't tell a word, and no more I won't. He shall cut me into inch pieces first."

"You are a noble fellow, Bill," said the lady. "In spite of your homely face and figure, you have the heart of a hero, and would not try to intrude your presence where it is not desired, as this gentleman would do."

"Lady," said the captain, who was standing upon the narrow belt of sand which ran along below the bank, "listen to me. I am not a man to persecute a lady. Say to me that you desire me to keep away from yonder island, and I will do so, upon one condition."

"And that condition, sir?"

"That I may be called upon the first sign of danger to you and yours."

"No danger can come to us here, sir," replied the lady. "Who would do injury to those who offend no man, and only seek to end their lives in peace and quiet in this desolate spot?"

"You do not know the subtlety of the Indian, or his innate cruelty," replied the captain. "It would be enough for him to know that you have white blood in your veins, and then he would destroy you. I know that bands of Indians are already on the war-path, and that there is danger to the outlying settlers."

"There is no danger to me or mine," persisted the lady.

"But promise me this. You seem to know my messenger, Bill Epps, and trust in him. A rough Mercury, but honest enough and obstinate enough when need be. If you are in danger, give Bill Epps the word, and he will pass it to me, and if I am above the earth you shall have aid."

Something in the chivalrous bearing of the young man

tonched the lady, for she looked at him with a less careless manner, evidently pleased by his proffer of friendship.

"I thank you, sir," she said, softly. "I happened to overhear your controversy with Bill Epps, and his refusal to tell any thing of the secret which by accident was placed in his keeping. I thought you one of those men who, from mere carelessness, wished to penetrate the secret of the place. Do you promise that, except I am in real danger, you will not follow me?"

"It is a hard condition," he replied. "But—you have my promise."

"Thanks. Then you have mine as well. When I am in danger I will send Bill Epps to you, and claim your promise so nobly given. I must now bid you good-day."

"Will you not even trust me with your name?" he said.

"Your question is answered by this. Call me Perdita. One name is as good as another to me. And since I have lost all, friends, name, and station, there is no better name than that. Perdita let it be."

"But—"

"One thing more. Do not question Epps. If I know any thing of his character, he would not reveal any thing he knows, if laid upon live coals."

"Bet yer life," muttered Bill.

The head of the boat swung swiftly round, the oars dropped into the water, and, like a bird seeking its nest, took its way toward the rocky island in the distance. A jutting point soon hid her from view, still pulling with a practiced hand, looking back at the pair, while, with the water dripping from his drenched clothing, Captain Laurence Austen stood upon the narrow sand beach, like Niobe, the picture of woe.

Who was this strange girl, who called herself Perdita and came and went like a vision? Why had she trusted in Bill Epps—Hungry Bill, the butt of the garrison—when she would not trust in the leader of fashion in his own circle in Albany, and the breaker of ladies' hearts along the Mohawk? It was in that early day when the colonies had to keep watch and ward over their dangerous neighbors, the French in Canada, and their still more dangerous allies, the Hurons and St. Regis. Captain Austen was known far and near as a

gallant Indian-fighter and was distinguished for bravery amounting almost to madness, when in the face of the enemy. His present expedition had led him through this section, and his mission was to discover whether the Indians were really upon the war-path, and to what extent the Six Nations were disaffected, as it had been whispered that the Oneidas were harboring messengers from the French. With the struggle this story has nothing to do, further than to explain the presence of this young man in this wild region, with but a single companion.

Hungry Bill still sat upon the bank, knocking his heels in a disconsolate manner against the stones, and looking after the disappearing boat. As it rounded the point, he gave a sigh of pleasure, and then took up his tune just where he left it off.

"How came you to know that this beautiful girl made this lake her home?" said Austen, taking a seat beside him.

Bill looked at him in a reproachful manner, and passed his hand across his nose, very much as a man does who thinks his nose is bleeding and is disappointed.

"You heard me, Bill?" said Austen.

"Now, that won't do, you know, capt'in," replied Bill, in the same mournful tone. "You *know* it won't. It's a good plant, but what's the use? I ain't book-larnt, or any thing of that sort, but I know how to keep my tongue between my teeth, and I mean to do it."

"You are determined to tell me nothing of this lady who calls herself Perdita?" said Austen. "Then your pretended attachment to me is all a sham."

"Attachment be darned." said Bill. "I ain't got nothin' to say to that. I promised not to tell any thing about the little gal, and I guess I'll keep my word."

"Of course, of course. I did not wish to worm your secret out of you, Bill," said Austen. "Only I would give my commission to know about this lady and where she lives."

"You couldn't give it to me," said Bill; "so it don't matter. Now, then, hadn't we better attend to business, unless you'd like to sling me into the water ag'in. Suit yourself; I ain't particular, nolow."

"Pshaw. You know how hasty I am, Bill."

"Rayther hasty, I allow. Waal, ain't we a-goin' to eat nothin' to-day?"

"Eat! Do you want to eat again? Where does all your food go?"

"That's an open question. I'm hungry ag'in. I seem to be hungry all the time. Jest wait a bit."

CHAPTER II.

FOUR TO ONE.

HUNGRY BILL took up his haversack, which, luckily for him, had been lying on the ground during his controversy with the captain, and unclasping the buckle drew out an immense piece of bacon and a piece of corn bread, of corresponding size. Then, sitting upon a log, with the bread in one hand and the bacon in the other, he began to eat in a manner which spoke well for his gastronomic powers, but would have carried desolation into the soul of the man who was forced to feed him. The captain looked on with a smile, and Bill watched him in a half apologetic way as he took a large, semicircular bite out of the bacon, with his head very much on one side.

Our captain looked on in silent admiration, until repletion took place, and Hungry Bill, hungry no more for the present, buckled up his haversack and slung it over his shoulder. The captain picked up his rifle, slipped a buck-skin sheath over the stock to keep it dry, and signaled to his companion to lead the way, which he did at the long lopé peculiar to the Indian and to the white man who passes his life in the woods. The young man was moody, for he was thinking of the lady he had met, and her strange place of residence. Their course led them beside the lake, hidden at times from their view by some projecting headland, and again shining like silver through the leaves. A strange sound disturbed the stillness all at once, and Bill Epps paused, holding up his hand as a signal to his companion. What was the sound? A tinkle of steel and a hurried tramp of feet in a little glen a few

paces to the right. Beckoning to his companion to follow his example, the young guide took the cover from his rifle, and changed from the hungry, careless boy, to the woodman wild for battle. His gray eyes flashed, and his step was that of the panther creeping on his prey.

Hush!

The click of steel became louder as they advanced, and mingled with it came a hurried breathing as of men in deadly conflict. Bill Epps parted the bushes with his left hand, holding his rifle ready in the other, and peeped in. Captain Austen did the same and saw who made the noise which had turned them from their course. Three Indians, in the dress of the St. Regis of the lakes, were assailing a single warrior, whose dress, and the war-eagle on his naked breast, told that he was one of the great Oneida nation. He stood with one foot thrown backward, bearing his weight upon it, like a tiger ready for a spring, holding in one hand a heavy tomahawk, already dyed by the blood of his enemies, and in the other a long knife purpled to the hilt. Austen could not repress a start of surprise and admiration at the noble figure of the young Indian. Standing nearly six feet in height, with muscular shoulders, powerful limbs, and brawny hands, he was a picture of forest comeliness. His dress was of buck-skin, ornamented by beads in fanciful figures, in which the Indian women so excel. These workings were the totems of the tribe, the eagle, and the lesser totems handed down from time immemorial to the people of the Six Nations. His opponents were strong and wiry men, the pick of a nation at all times warlike and aggressive, whose eyes sparkled with rage as they struck again and again at the resolute figure of the Oneida, who, with a smile upon his lips, even in the face of such fearful odds, warded off their blows. At his feet, with a gory mark upon his forehead where that terrible hatchet had fallen, lay a huge Indian, and over his body his comrades pushed forward to avenge him. All had paused a moment by mutual consent, for two of the St. Regis were wounded and the third out of breath, while the Oneida, unwounded, calm, and untiring, stood like a statue carved in bronze, with that smile upon his dark face.

"Children of the St. Regis," he cried, as they bent forward with leveled weapons, "what are ye, to assail a chief, though young, of the great nation of the Oneidas? A girl of the tribe would laugh if only four St. Regis assailed her on the war-trail, and would take their scalps home to hang in her wigwam. Go; I seek not your blood, for my mission is one of peace."

"Let the Oneida sing his death-song," replied the unwounded St. Regis, waving his knife in the air. "Shall the man who has shed the blood of Pascagoula, the warrior who lies at your feet, live to go back to his village, to laugh at what he has done? No; Canzato is a great brave; his hand shall avenge the dead Pascagoula."

"Dog of a St. Regis," replied the young chief, lifting his bloody weapons above his head, "beware what you do. I would not quarrel with the St. Regis to-day, but that they assailed me. I see visions of blood and death; there are clouds in the sky which hang over the St. Regis lodges, which will not go away. But they are growing darker. Take up dead Pascagoula, for behold! I give him to you, and the storm shall pass away."

The only reply was a sudden onslaught, which for a moment bore the single man back, and the terrible struggle recommenced. Although upon his guard, the united and desperate assault upon three sides was a terrible one to meet, and the young man was wounded in the left shoulder. Striking a desperate blow at the man on his right hand, he whirled suddenly upon Canzato, beat down his guard, and stretched him beside the body of Pascagoula. But, in doing this, he had exposed himself to the blows of the other two, and they rushed in together. But, to their utter surprise, the moment he struck the blow, the chief dropped as if he had received a bullet in his brain, and the two St. Regis stumbled against each other in their mad haste, and one of them slightly wounded the other with his knife, while the Oneida was ten feet away, looking at them with a calm smile of derision!

Their rage knew no bounds now, and it was a matter of life or death to them. Either they or the Oneida must go down, and, gathering all their remaining strength, they rushed at him again. Wounded, bleeding rapidly, and fatigued by

the long-continued combat with such unequal forces, the brave man fought with a determination and skill worthy of the knights of old. His keen eyes glanced from side to side, and he struck again and again in reply to the fierce blows of his savage enemies. But all his address could not keep their weapons off his body, and he was wounded again—this time in the right arm. Desperation only could save him.

Bounding suddenly backward, he turned as if to fly, and the St. Regis started in pursuit. One, who was wounded in the hip, could not keep up with the other, and a distance of twenty feet soon separated them. The Oneida did not run out of the little glen, but round about it, seemingly with the design of tiring out his enemies. His real design became apparent soon. It was like the old battle between the Horatii and Curatii in the old Roman days, when Horatius saved Rome from Alba. As soon as the two St. Regis were sufficiently separated, the young man turned like a tiger and bounded upon the nearest. Vain was his strength against the wonderful prowess of his assailant. As the second Indian came up panting, he saw his last companion fall before the invincible weapon of the chief, and, bounding forward, the two were locked in a deadly grapple upon the bloody sod.

It was a scene worthy a painter's pencil. These gallant though savage men, wounded in half a dozen places, their blood dropping at every pulsation, never thought of flight. In the first grapple each had seized his opponent by the wrist of his knife-hand and dropped his broken hatchet, leaving it a question of brawn and muscle. But that the Oneida had lost more blood than his opponent, the battle would have been of short duration, although the St. Regis was by far the strongest of the four who had assailed the young chief. But the last wound the latter had received had been in the wrist, and was bleeding fast, and draining even his giant strength rapidly. He felt that he must overcome his enemy at once, or not at all. Their dark bodies were intertwined in an embrace which realized the thought of Byron :

" Friends meet to part, love laughs at faith,
True foes, once met, are joined till death."

The hurried breathing of these desperate foes sounded in the ears of Laurence Austin. Twice he was on the point of

rushing out to the aid of the noble young Oneida, but as often had been restrained by the hand of Bill Epps.

"Let him alone," whispered the guide. "I know the chief, and he would think it an insult if you went to help him now. Oh, ain't he just glorious!"

"Noble fellow!" said the captain. "He must not be overcome."

When the young chief apparently turned to fly, Austen raised his rifle, but once more the guide held him back. "Don't do it," he said. "I smell a trick here. You will see in a moment. Ha! look at that! Down he goes!"

The last exclamation was elicited when the Oneida turned upon his pursuers and struck the foremost to the earth. The close grapple with the fourth followed, and Bill Epps thought it time to act. Drawing his knife from his belt, he darted from the thicket to the side of the combatants, when one of them released his knife-hand and struck a terrible blow. The next instant the Oneida rose to his feet, reeling, and looking fiercely at Bill Epps through a bloody mist, which seemed to hang before his eyes.

"Come on!" he murmured. "An Oneida never yields."

As he spoke, he tottered like a pine before the ax of the woodman, and Bill Epps caught him in his arms and laid him gently down, shouting for his companion:

"Here, capt'in! Hurry up. Don't ask any questions, but work. Tear off that calico huntin'-shirt from yon dead Injun, and tear it into strips. This poor fellow has got it bad."

"Do you know him?"

"Know him? I guess I do. Why, it is young Chenango, called 'the generous' among the Oneidas."

"Is it possible? The very man I came to see," said Austen, anxiously.

"Yes, and the best friend we have among the Oneidas, next to the chief sachem. This yer young 'un can draw all the young braves with him, and he always takes them to our side. Here, don't be afraid to tear that shirt. That feller won't git mad; he ain't on it. This is a bad cut in the arm, by Jinks! I'm afraid I can't do it up right. Take my canteen and run to the lake for some water. Be spry."

The white-haired guide seemed to have changed places with

the captain, and the officer did not dispute with him, but snatching up the canteen ran with it to the lake at his best speed and returned in a moment. The guide washed out the worst cut Chenango had received, that upon the wrist, and bound it tightly after applying a compress to the upper part of the forearm to stop the flow of blood. It was all he could do under the circumstances, and then he attended to the other wounds, which were of less importance.

"I wish I knowed how to take up that little artery," muttered the guide, nervously. "It ain't done right, I know. But how the deuce can I help it? Wait; hooray! Jest you stay here, cap'n, and see that the compress don't slip off, and wait for me. I'll be back in half an hour."

"Where are you going?"

"No matter. You wait."

He started off at a run, and the young man could hear his rapid feet going back over the ground they had so lately traversed. What did it mean? Why had their guide left them so suddenly? He could only wait for events to shape themselves. Sitting down by the side of the insensible Indian he bathed his forehead with water, and soon after was rewarded, for he uttered a deep sigh, and then regained his consciousness, and looked with a start of surprise at the figure of the white man sitting by him.

"Who is this?" he said. "Did the St. Regis conquer Chenango in the battle? Then let him die."

"No, no," replied the white man, gratified that the Indian could speak the English language. "Do not fear. You were the victor."

"It is good," said the savage. "But why is this? I am weak; I feel like a little child which lies upon its mother's breast."

"You have lost much blood, and Bill Epps has gone for some one to help you."

A smile broke over the face of the Indian at the mention of the name, but the effort to speak was too much for him, and he again fainted. The young captain looked with a pitying eye upon the strong young frame beneath him, and thought with wonder of the strange victory he had achieved over four strong men eager for his blood.

The half-hour passed, and the young man began to be impatient, when he heard the sound of hurried steps, and sprung to his feet, grasping his rifle. He was reassured the next moment, for he saw the draggled cap of Hungry Bill appear above the bushes, and he stepped into the circle, closely followed by a man advanced in life, with a long, gray beard, an erect, soldierly frame, and deep blue eyes. There was something in this old man, found so strangely in this savage wilderness, which reminded the young captain of some one he had seen, but where he could not tell. Who was he?

CHAPTER III.

THE MASKED CHIEF.

THE stranger, without question, walked with a stately step to the side of the Indian, and kneeling upon the earth, laid upon the ground a silver-inlaid box, which, when opened, revealed a case of surgical instruments, carefully preserved and ready for instant use. Raising the arm of the wounded man, he looked at the precautions taken by the guide with a sad smile which well became his noble face.

"Your compress has done its work well, Epps," he said. "It has stopped the bleeding, and but for that, by this time my skill would have been of but little use. The Oneida may thank you for a life preserved, not me. I shall only complete your good work."

He went to work like a master of surgery, and with a quickness and delicacy of touch which was wonderful, he took up the severed artery and bandaged the arm neatly and quickly. This done, he rose to his feet, just as the Indian came to his senses.

"He must not remain here," he said. "Even at the risk of discovery, I must take him to a place of safety. Can you two carry him to the boat?"

Hungry Bill made a signal to his captain, and the two lifted the heavy body of the Indian in their arms and carried him

down to the beach. Here, drawn up on the shining sand, was the light boat in which the lady who called herself Perdita was seen that morning. The stranger stooped and removed two of the forward thwarts, so that they could lay the patient in the boat.

" You must leave your comrade here, Epps," said the stranger. " I beg your pardon, sir, but for reasons I can not explain, I must beg of you not to go with us, but to remain where you are for the present. As soon as we have placed this noble Indian in a place of safety, Epps shall return."

" I am only grieved that you will not trust me as well as my guide," replied the young captain. " But let it be as you say."

" Epps has already gained possession of my secret," replied the stranger. " In what manner I need not say. He has kept that secret nobly, even in the face of persecution, and I regard him as my best, I had almost said my only, friend in this colony."

" Git out," said Epps, bashfully. " I ain't done any thing yit, but you just wait till I git a chance, and if I don't help you then I'm a sucker."

" I can trust you," replied the old gentleman, quietly. " You know I trust you. At some future day, sir, perhaps I may be able to explain to you why I am a hermit in this wild region ; not now, not now."

Epps took his place at the oars ; the gentleman—for a gentleman he undoubtedly was—took a seat in the stern, and the boat shot out upon the tranquil surface of the lake, scattering the myriad water-fowl before it, leaving Captain Austen standing upon the narrow belt of sand along the water's edge. Who was this strange old man, who came like a specter and vanished ? Why had he trusted Epps, as the girl had done ? and how had the guide been able to find him so quickly ?

The boat, under the sturdy strokes of the oars in the hands of Bill Epps, passed out of sight behind the same headland near which he had last seen the lady, and Laurence Austen felt a deep feeling of loneliness come upon him, such as he had never felt before. He was alone—alone in the deep forest. Before him the bright water over which he could not

pass, behind him the limitless forest and the bodies of the dead St. Regis. From whence had these savages come, and what were they doing in this country, the home of their inveterate foes, the Oneidas? They certainly must have come upon some secret and important expedition, or they would not be here. It was evident that their meeting with the Oneida had been purely an accident, and that their natural hatred of his tribe had induced them to assail him.

As he stood there, ruminating upon the strange events which the day had brought, there pealed out in the woods behind him a cry which, once heard, is never forgotten, and he had heard it too often in battle to make any mistake in it now. The mournful, wailing, tremulous cry could be nothing else than the note which an Indian raises over the dead of his own nation found upon the trail. The sound came from the spot where the dead warriors lay. The St. Regis had found their dead!

Laurence Austen was no coward. A soldier by profession, he knew what it was to be in danger, and that never in his life had he been in greater peril than now. He felt a strange thrill as that sudden cry announced to him the coming of the savages, and he looked about him for a hiding-place. He knew that the Indians would not hesitate long before following the trail, which they had taken no pains to conceal. The discovery of the bodies was followed by angry exclamations and cries for vengeance, apparently from many throats, until a commanding voice was heard rising above the din of the savages; a great silence fell, and the young man knew that they had found the trail. There was only one way by which he might escape. Stepping on stones to hide his trail, he passed some distance, and then clasped the trunk of a huge beech tree six feet from the ground, and climbing rapidly, buried himself in the branches just as the foremost savage appeared upon the bank below, and then leaped down upon the sand. He was followed by others, some of whom remained upon the bank, looking down upon the beach, while others joined their companions below. Austen was familiar enough with Indian costumes to know that these were of the same tribe as the men slain by Chenango—the St. Regis, ever the faithful allies of the French. They were uttering low cries of disappointment

and rage, as they saw by the marks on the sand that their enemies not only had a boat, but had disappeared.

"Ugh!" said one tall fellow, in a fanciful dress, speaking in the Indian tongue. "Shall the blood of our brothers cry to us out of the earth in vain? Have these murderers wings, to fly away?"

"White men have been here," said another. "See; does an Indian put such things as these upon his feet? But where is the Oneida whose tracks we saw yonder?"

"Ugh! the white men have carried him away."

"Let us call the white chief," said one of the St. Regis. "He is very wise, and will tell us what to do."

As he spoke, a firm step sounded upon the bank above, and a tall form pushed its way through the crowd of St. Regis and leaped down upon the beach. The Indians evidently revered him as a leader. Thrusting one or two young warriors out of his path, he stooped and examined the signs upon the sand.

"Bah! it is useless," he said. "Whoever has done this deed has taken a boat and gone his way. Sons of the St. Regis, the heart of the white chief is very sad when he thinks how great an evil this will be to tell in the villages, when we return, if we do not bring back many scalps. Let it teach you to hate the Yengees more and more."

A savage murmur was the only reply he received, but many hands were shaken in a threatening manner across the bright water.

"Go back to the dead, children of the St. Regis, and prepare to bury them out of your sight. I will come to you when I have suffered my tears to flow."

The white chief was left alone upon the beach, and parting the branches softly, Austen looked down at him. He saw a man considerably taller than himself, clothed in a rich, dark hunting garb, but wearing, in a sort of Scotch bonnet, a single heron feather, as the sign of his rank in the St. Regis. He evidently was a man of gigantic strength, and his voice had the true ring of command in it. As he raised his head and looked back toward the shore, the young man saw that he wore a mask which covered his face to the upper lip. This mask was securely fastened behind, so that no slight force could tear it off. But there was a blemish in the man which ruined an

otherwise noble frame. He was slightly hunchbacked, or rather, one shoulder rose higher than the other, giving him a distorted and ungainly look. The eye which looked so keenly over the lake was one of wonderful power, keen and piercing, and Austen felt that the man could be a dangerous enemy. Bending forward to get a fuller view of him, a rotten limb upon which his foot inadvertently rested gave way and precipitated him to the bank below, unhurt, but full in the sight of the masked chief, whoever he might be. Austen started to his feet, and for a brief space the two looked into each other's eyes with a questioning stare.

"Who are you?" hissed the mask. "I need not ask that, since you wear the accursed uniform of the Colonial Rifles. You are mine, and thus I claim you."

Too proud to cry out for aid, and knowing that it was more likely to come to the masked chief than himself, the young captain closed with his Herculean antagonist and exerted all his strength to bear him to the ground. "Larry" Austen was famed in Albany for feats of muscle, and no ordinary man could put him on his back, and this the masked chief found. In vain he put out his almost superhuman strength in the endeavor to raise the young man from the ground and fall upon him; the feet of the captain seemed glued to the earth, and although his body swayed backward and forward before the gigantic strength of the mask, he still stood up.

"Curse you!" hissed the mask. "I'll have you, by this hand!"

"You must win me ere you wear me," was the cool reply. "I hope to show you that Laurence Austen is no child in arms. Call your myrmidons, you may need them."

"Never!" whispered the masked chief. "We will fight this battle out alone. Look to yourself."

They had paused a moment, by mutual consent, while the whispered conversation went on, and, at the signal, they again put out their great strength. It was the battle of the giants. Up and down the shining sand, hand and foot ready to take advantage of any slip on the part of the other, the two strong men fought. The pride of the mask evidently was aroused; he would not call out for help, although he felt that while he had the most strength, Austen was a scientific

wrestler, and what an accident or a misstep might give him the advantage. That advantage came suddenly. Austen seemed to stumble, and the mask threw himself forward to finish the struggle, when, by a dexterous twist of his body, the captain recovered himself, and before the mask had time to brace again, deposited him on the sand, breathless and half stunned. Snatching the dagger from its sheath, the captain held it at the throat of his vanquished enemy, who saw that he was overcome, and was about to call for aid.

"Hush! For your life—for your life, man! What would you do?"

"Would you kill me?"

"What else could I do if you bring down the St. Regis on me?" replied the young captain. "Beware."

"Stick it to him, captain," said a voice, suddenly. "Stick hard and sure, and then run as ef the devil kicked you on eend. The fat is in the fire."

Giving his enemy a rap on the head which would have stunned an ox, the young man snatched up his rifle and ran into the water to meet Hungry Bill, who was urging his own canoe, which he always kept upon the lake, with all the force of his arm. But the captain was not fated to escape so easily, for just then the St. Regis began to swarm down the bank, and catching a glimpse of their leader, lying prostrate and senseless upon the sod, they raised a shout of anger, and dashed into the water in pursuit of the young captain. He saw that he was overtaken, and, turning, clubbed his rifle and swept down the first two who approached, while the dip of Hungry Bill's oar sounded nearer and nearer.

"Keep back, you thieving hounds," he cried, as he swept the weapon from side to side. "Keep back if you value your lives."

Again three or four of them rushed in with their hatchets, but the strong arm beat them back. But just then the mask recovered, and shouted angrily to them in the Indian tongue. At the order, for such it seemed, the whole party rushed in at the obstinate young soldier, just as Hungry Bill was within three canoes' lengths of him.

"Dive!" shouted Bill. "Dive like a duck, darn you!"

Throwing away his rifle, which could be of no further use

to him, the young man obeyed, and disappeared from the view of the savages in the calm, blue water. At the same moment Hungry Bill whirled the head of the canoe the other way, and waited anxiously. A moment passed and the young man did not appear. Had he sunk forever in the deep water, never to rise until the deep gave up its dead? Another half-minute, and with a shout of joy, the guide saw the dark hair of the captain rise from the water, far in front. He had put into practice an old schoolboy trick of swimming under water, in which he had always excelled, and put a good distance between the shore and himself. The moment his head appeared the canoe was put in motion, shooting through the water, not in a direct line, but with a zigzag and erratic course, calculated to disconcert the aim of the savages. But, as good luck would have it, they left their firearms on the bank, taking only their knives and hatchets into the water. Two or three who had rifles commenced firing at the white-headed guide, but with poor success, for at each shot a wild laugh came back over the water.

With a magnanimity worthy of a man of higher rank, the guide kept his canoe in a line with the head of the captain, who was swimming rapidly outward, and thus shielded him from the shots of the enemy.

"Ha, yip!" he screamed, as a rifle-ball cut the air close to his face, almost razing the skin. "*That* made my face burn. The rascal meant it for me, I do declare! Never mind; a miss is as good as a mile. Swim on, capt'in; the more distance we put between us and the shore afore I take you in, the better for us."

Hungry Bill, standing upright in the stern of the canoe, the long paddle gripped in his nervous hands, and his white hair floating back in the afternoon wind, roused the anger of the Indians even more than the escape of the captain. As soon as they could reach their weapons, a volley came skipping over the water toward the tall figure of the guide. Most of them flew wide and some fell short, but a rattling sound was heard, and the long clay pipe which was stuck in the mouth of the guide fell broken to the ground, and for the first time, he stopped, and roared back a defiance at the enemy, while the captain climbed in over the bow of the canoe.

"What is the matter?" said Austen, anxiously. "Are you hurt?"

"Hurt be darned. Hurt? 'Tain't nothin' I s'pose to break a man's pipe in that unnat'r'l way! Look yer; I had that pipe in my mouth. 'Twas a good pipe, and has bin in the fam'ly nigh three hundred year. Yes, it has, by gum. Oh, darn your painted hide, Mr. Injin! Ef I don't have your sculp for that, then I'm a sucker."

And, shaking his fist at the Indians on the shore, Bill took to the paddle, and was soon safe from the fire of the enemy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ISLAND HOME.

WHEN there was no longer any danger from the fire of the savages, Bill ceased his labor and mournfully collected the shattered fragments of his pipe, muttering curses against the hand that sped the bullet.

"'Tain't no ornery clay pipe, you know, capt'in," said he. "Ef it was, do you think I would make such a fuss over it? But the truth of the matter is, that pipe has bin in the fam'ly so long I hate to lose it in such a dumb foolish way. Three hundred year my folks has kept that pipe, and now—"

"I bought it for you in Albany."

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"I bought that pipe in Albany," replied the young man. "Now don't pretend to get angry, old boy. Here is a piece of the stem you didn't throw over, and I know old Vanderdecken's pipes too well to be deceived."

To the captain's surprise, Bill Epps took him by the hand and shook it warmly.

"Thank you, capt'in, thank you. It's took a weight from my mind. Come to think it over, I left my gran'ther's pipe at home, packed up in cotton. The fam'ly relic is safe; I could weep tears of joy."

"Nonsense! Don't be a fool."

"Don't be a— By gosh! I'm gettin' so mad I don't know what to do. I guess we'd better quit. Here; the old man ain't goin' to stay with you any longer."

"Good-by," said Austen. "Give me the paddle before you go."

"Paddle! What fur?"

"As you are going to leave, of course you intend to swim ashore, and the paddie will be of use to me."

Bill looked at his companion with a vacant stare for a moment, then a grin came upon his face and he burst into a loud laugh.

"You know how to take the old man, don't you?" he said. This was one of Bill's many peculiarities. Although by no means old, he persisted in calling himself an old man. "I guess I won't swim to-day any more. Had enough this mornin'."

Just in front of them lay the island behind which the boat had gone which carried the senseless chief. Toward this point the canoe tended, shot round the point and landed in the little bay upon the other side. It was a beautiful spot, one of nature's most enchanting scenes. Above them, two hundred yards from the shore, rose a dark wood, evergreen vines mingling with the foliage of the beech and maple. Closer to the shore the ground was as level as a bowling green, and covered with short, green grass. Bill pushed his canoe up to the bank and held it while his companion reached the shore. This done, they fastened the canoe and stood together upon the bank of the island.

"No good to stay here. Come, let's go," said Bill, at once striking out on a fast walk.

The young captain followed. His course took them directly toward the center of the island, pushing through a narrow and tangled path until they came suddenly into a little opening, in the center of which a hut of hemlock boughs had been set up. Four stakes, with crotched tops, had been driven into the earth, and upon these crotches sticks were laid in the form of a square, roofed with poles. Upon the top of these, hemlock brush had been loosely thrown to form the roof, and the sides were formed of the same material, intertwined and securely bound. The front of it was left open.

Hungry Bill walked up to the opening and looked in, and a girl who was sitting upon a bear's hide before the door sprung up, at first with an expression of alarm, which changed to surprise when she saw who came. It was the lady who called herself Perdita, and upon a bed of picked moss in one corner of the room lay the strong figure of the Indian Chenango, fast asleep. His arm, bandaged as it had been that morning, was laid across his naked breast, and rose and fell with the pulsations of his strong heart. He was evidently well cared for.

"You!" cried the girl, looking almost fiercely at the captain. "I might have known you would try to penetrate my secret."

"Lady," said the young man, sadly, "your suspicion of me grieves me more than I dare to say. I have kept the letter of my agreement with you, and have only come here because we are assailed by Indians, headed by a man who has a white face but a black heart. I only escaped by good fortune, and reached the canoe, and Bill Epps brought me here."

"Bill Epps!" cried Perdita. "Have you betrayed me?"

The guide stood before her with bowed head, like a schoolboy about to be punished.

"I didn't think you'd be here, miss," he said. "I thought you'd be in the other place. I think it's no harm done to let us stay on this part of the island."

"Yes, if you do not go upon exploring expeditions," replied the girl, softening.

"He won't do that," said Bill, in his quiet way.

"And why?"

"Cause I'll shoot him ef he does. Don't *you* fret, miss. Epps will take keer of *you*."

"Let me hope that you will regard this assault upon me as the signal of danger to you, Miss Perdita," said the young soldier. "If you knew, as I do, the perfidy of which the Indians of the north are capable, you would fear for yourself as much as I do."

"What tribe are they?" she said.

"St. Regis."

Perdita grew deadly pale at the name of the tribe, gasped for breath, and laid her hand upon her bosom. "The St. Regis!"

"It's so, miss," said the guide. "You see, the chief here fell in with four of them, and had a little misunderstandin' with 'em. Them four Injins won't hurt no one no more. They ar' St. Regis, bet yer life. I know the breed."

"Stay here, both of you," said the girl, eagerly. "You are right, sir. The time has indeed come when we shall need your help. The St. Regis here!"

She caught up the Scotch bonnet, which lay upon the earth near at hand, and ran out of the hut, evidently winged by fear. The young captain looked a moment in surprise at his companion, and then, stooping low, he looked into the face of the wounded Indian.

"He sleeps well," said he. "Your surgeon is a man of skill, friend Epps."

"Yaas, yaas; bet yer life. He knows what to do. Waal, as we've got to wait a little while for the gal, I guess I'll take a snack. This chap is pooty hungry, I allow."

"Can you think of eating at a time like this?"

"Waal, capt'in, this coon thinks he kin. Anyway, he'll make a big try at it."

"What are you going to eat, then?"

"Hold your hosses, capt'in. I'll show you in half a minit. This critter never goes without his fodder, you know."

Pushing aside a heap of leaves near the head of the sleeping Indian, Hungry Bill drew out a small, oblong paper box, which, when opened, revealed several large slices of fried venison and some bread. Twisting his face into various shapes expressive of the highest enjoyment, Bill began to devour the savory food with a relish which no danger could take away, and a determination which nothing could daunt, while the young captain laughed in spite of himself.

"Wittles is wittles, capt'in, and I kin spoil my share."

"I should say that you could," said Austen, as he saw him stuff a piece of venison half the size of a man's hand into his mouth at once. "Take care you don't choke yourself."

"Not a choke,' said Bill, speaking with some difficulty. "Mortal pizen, why don't *you* eat suthin'? That little misunderstandin' with that ugly cuss they call the masked chief orter make you hungry. It allers does me when I have a fight. Look thar; the Injin is wakin' up."

As he spoke, Chenango lifted himself upon his unwounded hand, and stared about him in utter surprise. The old man who acted as his surgeon had given him some powerful narcotic, and he did not know he had been brought to the Hermit's Home.

"What is this?" he cried. "Has Chenango passed the silent river and entered the spirit-land? Who was there to light a fire for him to brighten his path across the deep river?"

"Be quiet," said the captain. "You are very weak, but with a little care you will soon be well."

"Yes, keep cool, red-skin," said Bill, showing himself. "You got into a pizen diffikilty with a lot of St. Regis braves, an' wiped 'em out, ef you remember."

"Oh, yes," replied the chief. "And my white brothers took me up when my blood was flowing?"

"'Twan't no more than I'd 'a' done for any human, but I calkilate I orter do as much as that for Chenango, the Oneida."

"My brother has a good heart," said the chief. "Chenango will remember the kindness of his white brother, and the day may come when his heart will grow warm toward the man who saved the life of the Indian."

"Don't bother, Chenango! I ain't goin' to stand any nonsense, you know. This coon is always ready to help those who help him."

"Listen," said Chenango. "There is a girl among the Oneidas whose heart is soft toward Chenango. She has broken the stick with him, and will go into the lodge and be his wife. If she shall bring a son in her arms some day to the chief, Chenango will tell her to teach him to love the white hunter who stopped the flowing blood of the father, and saved his life."

"Oh, get out, now!" said Bill, shuffling his legs uneasily.

"And for the young war-chief of the Yengees," said the Oneida, turning his dark, expressive eyes upon the face of Austen, "he is my brother, and I love him."

"You are very kind, Chenango," said the young captain. "I thank you."

"I am weary," said Chenango, letting his head drop again upon the moss. "As I lay here asleep, I had a dream. I

was not alone in the wigwam. A maiden of the Yengees, fair as a white spirit, came and sat by my bed and soothed me into rest. I felt a hand, soft as the hand of Natalie, the love of Chenango, laid upon my forehead, cooling its burning heat. A voice, soft as the whisper of the robin, sung in my ear, and lulled me into rest. Why do I wake and find it gone from me? Did the Great Manitou send to me Natalie clothed in the form of another, to give me rest?"

"It was no dream, Chenango. A fair white maiden was sitting by you when we came, but she is gone now."

"Will she not come back to the chief and let him thank her?" demanded the Oneida.

"She is here," replied Austen.

Gliding forward with the same airy tread, Perdita, bright in her beauty and grace, stood at the entrance of the leafy bower, looking in at them. Beside her, with a countenance expressing the utmost fear, was the old hermit who had come with Hungry Bill, to bind up the wounds of the Indian. He evidently had come in great haste, for his dress was disordered and he wore no hat.

"Captain Austen," he said, "Perdita tells me that you have just encountered a portion of the tribe known as the St. Regis. Is this true?"

"It is, sir. If necessary, my guide can corroborate my words."

"It is unnecessary, sir. I ought to have known it myself, but I must confess that in my haste I forgot myself completely, and did not look at the dead Indians, but thought only of the wounded man. Who leads this savage band?"

"I know nothing of him except that he is known as the masked chief," replied Austen. "I had a struggle with this man upon the bank of the lake, and I can vouch for it that he is a person of the greatest muscular power. I am not a light weight myself, but I assure you that I threw him only by a trick."

"*Masked*, you say?"

"Closely. A thick strap passes from the upper part around the head; another passes under the chin, making the mask a sort of skull-cap. It is put on with great care. He is, too, deformed in a slight degree."

"In what manner?"

"One of his shoulders is higher than the other."

"I do not understand that. The man I suspect had the form of Saul, tall as this chief, and as upright—the face of Apollo, and the heart of Apollyon—a fair mask given to hide the heart of a fiend—the livery of heaven to serve the devil in.' You look strangely at me, and I am saying too much. Young man, this morning you said to my daughter that you wished to serve her. Are you ready to keep your word?"

"To the death."

"You speak boldly, and your face shows a noble heart, or I misjudge mankind. But ah! so I thought of— But no matter. We are in danger of no ordinary kind, and perhaps can save ourselves, by your aid. Will you give it?"

"Try me."

"And you, Bill?"

"This chap is ready," said Bill, quietly.

"Hush!" said the old man.

Every one paused and listened, and heard a stealthy, cat-like step upon the forest leaves.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEATH OF THE PANTHER.

Who could it be, if indeed it was a human being? For some reason, which none of them could divine, a cold chill fell upon the party, and no one made a step in advance. Then Laurence Austen drew a pistol, and rushed forward. A louder disturbance was heard, and just as he emerged from the hut, closely followed by Bill Epps, a huge hairy ball came flying over the low bushes, and there crouched at their feet a huge panther, with distended jaws and gleaming eyes. They did not pause to consider how this savage beast had reached the island; whether it had made its lair in this desolate spot for weeks or only a few hours. Perhaps some tree upon which it rested had fallen into the water, and the panther, dreading the liquid element, had clung to it until it floated down to the

island. Be that as it may, the fierce beast crouched before them with fiery orbs glancing from side to side, as if selecting a victim.

No beast which roams through the American woods was, in the time of his power, more dreaded than the great panther. His tremendous strength, lightning-like swiftness in pursuit, and activity, made him more dreaded than even the grizzly bear, because old "Ephraim" was rarely seen near the haunts of men, but frequented only desolate places, while the panther came even into the sheepfold to seize his prey. As Austen pointed the pistol and pulled the trigger, a fierce growl sounded, but only the click of the lock was heard. In his haste, the young man had forgotten that he had been in the water, and that his pistols were in his belt all the time. To drop the useless weapon and draw his dagger was the work of an instant, but not a moment too soon, for the body of the panther appeared again in the air, bounding at the immovable figure of the young man, who stretched out his arm and received the heavy body upon the long blade, aimed to strike just in front of the shoulder. A jet of hot blood spouted in his face, and he was prostrated by the rush of the beast, and expected to feel her teeth in his flesh. But, although the heavy body still lay upon him, and he was half blinded by the flowing blood, the brute did not move. Slipping from beneath his savage enemy, Laurence struck again. But he struck a dead enemy. The first blow had been fatal, and the knife had gone home to the very heart of the king of the woods, directed by the hand of Providence.

"Good blow," said Bill, slapping the captain on the shoulder. "Couldn't have done it better myself. That's something to brag of when your black hair is like his," pointing to, the old man.

"Are you sure it is dead?" murmured Perdita, as she clung to her father. "Are you *very* sure?"

"Quite sure," said Austen, giving the body a kick. "I am a little proud of this achievement, upon my honor. This has been a busy day, and I will write it in red letters in my journal."

"Captain," said the gray-haired hermit, coming forward, "I have to thank you for my daughter and myself. I shudder

to think what might have been our fate if either of us had met this fierce brute, mad with hunger. But, perhaps there is another."

"I don't think it," said Bill Epps. "This critter wouldn't be here, 'cept for some accident, for the darned brutes don't take to water any more than a cat. I know all about 'em, 'cause I've fit 'em on every spot of ground, it seems to me, atween the Mohawk and New York. But, let's take this carrion away and throw it into the lake."

Assisted by the captain, he dragged the body of the panther through the bushes to the lake shore, which was only a few hundred feet from the point. Before throwing it into the water he took out his knife and scalped the brute in a scientific manner and thrust the ears into his belt. "Ef we get safe through all this, Captain Larry, you will like to have this to show."

So speaking, he gave the body a push with his foot and it dropped with a dull splash into the water below. Night was now coming on, and they hurried back to the hut.

"To attempt to hide from you the fact that my daughter and myself live in this island alone would be foolish," said the old man, "and I shall not deny it. My reasons are my own, and I do not care to give them. Enough that I seek here the quiet and rest from persecution which I could not find in my own land. Here I had thought to end my days, but my enemy has long arms, and can reach me, even here. Chenango, have you strength enough to walk a short distance?"

"Let me try," said the chief, rising. "Yes, but I am very weak."

"Lean upon me," said Austen, giving him his arm.

The chief accepted his aid gratefully, and walked feebly on after the others. A short walk through a narrow wooded path brought them to a place where a high bluff rose from the water thirty feet above its surface. At the back of this bluff the stones which went to form it in a great degree were scattered here and there in wild confusion as if they had been thrown there by the hand of nature. The old man stooped, and grasping a huge boulder which would have weighed half a ton, he moved it easily aside, revealing an opening which led to the heart of the bluff, apparently. The stone which he

had moved aside so easily rested upon a pivot, so arranged that a child might swing it, when the spring upon the inside was set. Perdita entered first, Captain Austen followed, assisting the chief, and the old man came last, closed the stone, and set the spring.

The path over which they passed was worn smooth and hard by much use, and led after three paces to a flight of earthen steps, leading upward. Reaching the top, Austen found himself in a small room, perhaps twelve feet each way, dug by the hand of man out of the heart of the hill. Upon the other side was an opening which showed another room of about the same size.

"Come and see how we get the air," said Perdita, as the chief sunk down upon a pile of skins in one corner. The captain followed her into the next room, and she removed three stones of different sizes from the wall, and showed him that upon this side the wall was not much more than a foot thick and was strengthened by saplings forced into the earth above and below. The roof was formed of the same material placed more closely together.

From the openings formed when the earth was removed they could look in three different directions and see the shore.

The only part which was hidden was the long stretch of water behind the island. The position was admirably chosen and showed a master mind in its construction.

"Is this your work, sir?" said the captain.

"Call me Marstowe," replied the hermit. "That is a name by which I have been known. Yes, this is my work, with much else which I will show you when the right time comes to avert the coming storm. It seems strange to you that a man like me, with a beautiful child like this, and with gray hair, should make myself a home in the wilderness—should become

hermit and recluse. Enough that I have done it, and nothing but a stern necessity could have forced this banishment from society upon me. Here, apart from the world, I hoped I had left behind my enemies. But, they will not let me rest. My God, they will not let me rest!"

"Father, father," moaned Perdita, throwing herself into his arms. "I am with you; I will be true to you for my life long."

"You too, Perdita. Yes, yes, you are well named Lost; you have lost every thing to make life sweet to the young, the wealth and station once yours, the companionship of the young—but I forget myself. You see how we live, gentlemen. In this place which I dug with my own hands to while away the time, I have lived two years, and they were as happy as any I ever passed in the haunts of men. We drink from pure cold springs, and eat the game and fish with which the good God has so bountifully supplied land and river. We lie down to rest at night secure in this strange retreat, and wake refreshed. We have no cares but to make each other happy, and we have done so until now."

"Did you never hope to leave this place?"

"In a certain contingency, very doubtful to say the least, I might," replied Marstowe. "I did not come hither alone. One man in the land from which I came knows that I am here, and should that contingency of which I speak arise, he would come to me, even at the risk of his life, to tell me of it. But others whom I have cause to dread, are more likely to come than he. Chenango, you must rest. As for us, we have work to do. I must know this night who these St. Regis are who have followed me to my island retreat."

"Followed you?"

"I think so."

"They may be a war-party simply."

"They ain't a war-party, nyther," said Bill. "This child knows better."

"Why?"

"Didn't I see three wimmin on the bank? Injins don't take wimmin on the war-path. I'll tell you what it is—the Injins come out hyar on mischief, but they didn't come to fight no more than they could help. Ef they kin steal any thing, or take a few sculps, they'll do it; but that ain't the object."

"Do you think you could find out their object?" demanded Marstowe.

"Bill Epps could try. Now what do you want him to do?"

"I want you to go with me, and try to discover who these men are."

"I'd ruther go alone."

"That will not do. I must go with you, to decide whether

I have more cause to fear this masked man than any of the Indians who roam through this wild region."

"I think I could do better alone."

"Impossible. I must go."

"Then this child must speak the truth. You ain't young enough to go into the danger I must go into. Can you crawl like a snake, and wake no echoes or rustle in the leaves? Can you walk as softly as a panther, and step on a stick without breaking it? Can you tell the cry of a loon that *is* a loon from the signal-call of the Indian, and see craft in every broken twig, and leaf turned over?"

"I am afraid I am not an adept in these things."

"Then I guess Hungry Bill would do better by himself."

"You do not know what you say. This man with the mask troubles me more than I can tell. I must know him, I must find out who and what he is. Why does he wear a mask? Why does he not come out boldly in the face of day, and let all men see him as he is?"

"Doubtless he has his reasons for this," replied the captain. "I am half inclined to think you had better let Bill have his way. He is a born scout, and you would only hamper his movements, I am sure."

"You give me this advice?"

"I must."

"And you, Perdita?"

"I do not think you have any right to risk your life uselessly, father. Bill Epps knows every foot of ground along the lake shore, and how to track the savages to their dens. Then why should you, who have no such knowledge, attempt to follow his steps?"

"I only wish Chenango was strong enough," said Bill, "and wouldn't we make the St. Regis hunt their holes? I reckon it's about time to go. Let us arrange our signals."

"You are careful."

"Got to be, in these times. This boy has had too many pizon quarrels with Injins not to know his gait poaty well by this time. Now look. You all know the call of the loon, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then let the loon-call be the signal. If I give it three

tines, one, a long stop, two, three, quick, then you kin know that I'm in danger. If I give it once, wait long enough to count three, and give it again, then that means I want Capt'in Larry. If you git it once alone, follered by the scream of the panther, that means danger for *you*. So lay low and keep dark, and let this coon *work!*"

Bill prepared himself in his own way. He stripped off all superfluous clothing, wearing only his greasy buck-skin trowsers and a calico undershirt, with a belt about his waist, into which he thrust his knife upon one side, and the dagger of Austen upon the other. His rifle he left upon the floor of the room, and was about to go out, when a thought seemed to strike him.

"Let no man undertake any sech work as this on an empty stomach. I'd hate to die hungry," he said. "Ain't you got a bite of something handy?"

"Ruling passion strong in death," said Austen, laughing. "You see in this the strength and weakness of Bill Epps. About to go out on a heroic undertaking, he turns back to satisfy the cravings of an unnatural appetite."

"He needs it, I am sure," said Perdita.

"This critter is poaty hungry," was the pathetic reply. "Most gone, Bill Epps is."

"And yet he devoured nearly a pound of venison steaks and bread in proportionate quantities not half an hour ago," said Austen. "There, get him something to eat, the humbug. I believe he'll turn cannibal some of these days."

"What's a kannible?" demanded Bill.

"An eater of human flesh."

"Then that ain't nothin'," rejoined Bill. "I'm a kannible already, ef that's all. I'll tell you how I cum to be one."

"If you begin in that strain now, we shall be bad friends, Bill Epps," said the captain. "Get him something to eat quickly, Miss Perdita, and stop his mouth, or he will be telling some of his disgusting stories about eating snakes and toads. Pah!"

"Now ain't he got an awful temper, miss? I leave it to you. Did you ever hear tell of such a chap?"

Perdita laughed, and set before the speaker a plentiful supply of venison steaks and corn bread, the staple food in that

region, and he ate with as keen an appetite as if he had not tasted food for three days, while the men of the party stood impatiently waiting for him to finish, and wondered at his colossal appetite. But Bill ate on, unconscious of the admiration which he inspired, while the supply of bread and bacon decreased at an alarming rate.

"You'd breed a famine about as quick as a swarm of hogs, my young friend," said the captain. "Are you nearly done?"

"Pooty nigh."

"Then take some of it with you and eat as you go. I think there is no time to spare."

He hardly thought Bill would take him at his word, but that individual at once spitted four slices of venison upon his dagger's point, crowned the whole with a slab of corn bread, and started.

"Provisioned for a siege," said Austen, looking at him angrily. "Will you never conquer that depraved appetite?"

"I guess I will in time," replied Bill. "I work hard to conker it, but it takes a deal of venison to do it."

"I will show you the way out, and go with you to the canoe," said Marstowe. "Remain here with the chief, Perdita."

The three passed out together and went down to the shore. The canoe lay where they had left it, and after a short conference, in which he recapitulated his signals and impressed them upon the minds of his hearers, the scout pushed out into the darkness. Listening as carefully as they could, they could not even hear the stroke of his paddle, and knew to what perfection Bill Epps had brought his Indian habits. The old man returned to the cave, while the captain sat down upon the headland, to await the signal of Bill Epps.

CHAPTER VI.

HUNGRY BILL IN TROUBLE.

HE sat there in a sort of waking dream, looking out across the dark water, thinking indistinctly of Perdita and Marstowe, of Chenango and the masked chief, and wondering what connection that strange man had with the new friends he had made that day. He was evidently a man of importance among the St. Regis, else why did they obey him in every thing? He was proud of his achievement in overthrowing a man of his muscular power, and was going over the struggle in his mind, when the light of a torch gleamed out for a moment on the lake in front, and disappeared as suddenly as it came. Then it gleamed again, again appeared and he saw it no more.

He sprung to his feet, and ran out upon the headland as far as he could go, until he stood directly over the cavern home of Perdita and her father, twenty feet below. Lying prostrate upon the bluff, he peered out across the water, and satisfied himself that some kind of craft was slowly approaching the island. As it drew nearer and paused under the bluff, he made out two men astride of a log, which they propelled by means of flat pieces of wood, such as we see drifting along the beach of any lake or river. He could make out their plumed head-dresses, and knew that they were Indians. Just then he heard the call of Bill Epps, signifying danger to those on the island.

"Your call did not come too soon, my friend," he thought. "Let us see what can be done."

The log had come to a halt directly below him, and one of the men spoke in a low whisper:

"What will the chief do here?" he said.

"Silence," was the low reply. "The blackbird chatters, but the great bear of the St. Regis keeps silent."

"Both Indians," thought the captain. "I need no help."

Drawing himself carefully ahead, he felt something strike his hand and grasped it. It was a large stone, weighing

perhaps ten pounds, with knobs upon it which would not fit well if applied forcibly to the human head. Lifting it carefully, without noise, he bent forward, and threw it with all his force at the head of the nearest savage. He heard a dull, crunching sound, and knew that he had not missed his mark, and the leading Indian rolled into the water with a broken skull. The second man, in alarm, endeavored to back out of the dangerous position in which he found himself, but the captain was too quick for him. Throwing himself over the bluff, he landed upon the head and shoulders of the Indian with a shock which nearly shook the breath out of his body. But he was a powerful savage, and quickly recovering himself, grappled with his foe in a determined manner, which showed that he had no design of tamely yielding to the enemy. He had an advantage over the captain in one respect, for while he could cling to the clothing of the soldier, his own body was bare, with the exception of the breech-clout, and his skin was lubricated with the oil of the wild goose in such a way that to grapple with him was next to impossible. The water was not deep, and the two men struggled to their feet, with laboring breath and strained muscles. Austen had managed to seize the rascal by the wrist of his right hand, and he could not use his knife, though he struggled to get his hand free for that purpose. Seeing that this was useless, his endeavor was now to get into deeper water, and thereby force the young white man to loose his hold. But the captain shot out his left hand, and grasping the savage by the scalp-lock, he forced his head under the water, and in spite of his struggles, nearly succeeded in drowning him, when the savage kicked vigorously, and they slipped off into deeper water, where the young man was forced to relax his grasp, and get back to the shallow water. The savage was too exhausted to attempt to swim away, and also returned, drawing his knife as he did so. Austen rushed at him again, and delivered a blow with that unfailing left hand which laid the savage senseless upon the sandy beach. Wresting his weapon from his hand, the young man threw it into the water, and then whistled for Marstowe, who joined him in a moment, and they dragged the Indian up the bank, and laid him on the grass. The blow dealt him by Austen had laid open his forehead like the kick of a horse, and he was bleeding profusely.

"How did this happen?" said Marstowe, as he looked into the face of the savage by the light of a small dark-lantern he had brought from the cave, keeping the open face turned toward the center of the island. Austen explained.

"Then you have heard no signal from Bill Epps?"

"Yes. He gave it a moment ago."

"Which signal?" demanded Marstowe.

"Danger to us. He had doubtless found that the savages had sent out these men as spies. There is no better scout in the Indian country than Bill Epps. I have tried him in many ways, and though he has a rough shell, he is a pearl beyond all price. How did you know him?"

"That is soon told. I was out upon a hunting expedition to the mainland, and there I was attacked by a wounded stag. You are a hunter yourself, and know what it is to meet a mad stag at bay. I am not the man I once was; age and much trouble has robbed once well-knit sinews of their strength. Bill Epps appeared upon the scene and shot the stag while he was rushing at me to finish me. After that, Perdita was assailed by a wandering Indian of the Mohawk tribe, a freebooting rascal, who cared not who he made his prey. Bill was again on hand, and killed the savage. We buried him upon the slope of the hill across the channel, near the spot where you saw Perdita this morning."

"You were the cause of our quarrel. Like most young men I have a fancy for unraveling mysteries, and your residence here is a mooted point at Albany. Some believe it, others do not. I thought my friend Bill knew something of it, and asked him. Upon that subject the oracle was mute."

"I believed him to be a man to be trusted, and so I confided to him the secret of my residence here, and asked him to keep it still a secret. I see he has kept his word."

"You may be sure of that. The fellow has been offered presents at one time and another of infinite value to him as a scout, but he has always refused to tell the secret. I myself offered him a beautiful rifle, worth forty guineas, if he would tell me, but he persisted in his refusal. You could not have trusted a worthier man."

"He is a strange character. Why does he keep silent now? I fear some evil has befallen him."

"I think not. If he is in any personal danger you will surely hear from him. He is doubtless lurking about the camp of the masked chief, seeking to gain intelligence, and it is evident that he has already discovered that these fellows have come over to spy upon us, and given us the sign. Ha! strike him! Do not let the villain escape!"

Their conversation was brought to a sudden close. The Indian at their feet had been "shamming Abraham." Taking advantage of their conversation, he rolled suddenly out of their reach, and leaped from the bluff, followed a moment after by Austen. But he was too late, for when he gained the sand below, the savage was already half a dozen yards from the shore, astride of the log, paddling for his life. Austen raised his pistol, the companion of the one he had tried upon the panther, but, as before, it missed fire, and the savage escaped.

"I do not like that," cried Austen. "He will tell them that some one else besides Bill Epps and myself are on the island."

"Hark!" cried Marstowe.

They heard the signal which called the captain to the other shore, pealing out across the water. "I must go. Where is your boat?"

"Wait here a moment," cried Marstowe, with eagerness. "I will bring it directly."

Springing over the bluff, he disappeared in the darkness. A moment after the young man heard him call, and leaping down after him, found him standing on the shore, holding the light boat which Perdita had used. Austen sprung in and seized the oars, the old man sat in the stern, and the boat shot out in the track of the flying Indian.

"Give way!" cried the old man, eagerly. "We may run that scoundrelly Indian down if we take care."

The boat seemed to fly across the water, under the vigorous strokes of the young captain, while Marstowe bent eagerly forward and scanned the dark space between him and the shore.

"I see him," he whispered. "Row as you never rowed before. I will steer you upon him. He does not see us yet. One stroke with the right hand. Keep her steady. Ah! he sees us. Lay down to it; pull hard!"

The Indian on the log had seen his pursuers, and was making frantic efforts to escape, but the heavy log moved like a snail, compared with the rapid movements of the skiff. The savage looked over his shoulder and redoubled his efforts. But, a hundred yards still separated him from the haven of safety; not much on land, but a long stretch on water for the last minute of a desperate struggle. Ten feet of water only showed between the savage and his foes, when they saw his tall figure tower up suddenly upon the log, and heard the sullen plunge, as he dove into the bright water.

"Row on," whispered Marston. "Heavens! he will escape."

The young captain gave three rapid strokes and then paused. He knew that if the savage came up at all it would either be close to the shore or somewhere near the spot. He was not mistaken. The savage popped out of the water within three feet of them, and unshipping his right-hand oar, Austen struck at him with the blade. The force of the blow was expended upon the water, for the Indian drew a long breath and sunk just in time. When he rose again he was within a few feet of the shore, and in shallow water. He rose, made a gesture of derision, and uttered a yell as a signal to his comrades, and ran up the bank.

"Chaw *that*, you 'tarnal critter!" shouted a well-known voice, and Hungry Bill started up suddenly from the covert of the bushes, shot out his long arm, and gave the Indian a buffet which sent him rolling to the sand below. But this fellow was gifted with a hard head, and by the time he reached the strand, the savage was on his feet, and ran along the shore toward the lower end of the lake.

"Go to Satan!" roared Bill. "The old man won't chase you."

"What say you, Bill?" cried the young captain. "Shall I come ashore?"

"I'll come to you," replied the guide. "The old man has something to tell you. Run in close."

They landed upon a little point, which ran out into the lake, and the captain and faithful guide shook hands and were about to push off, when half a dozen dark forms plunged down upon the sand and attempted to detain them. The captain wa-

already in the boat, and saw that his border friend was struggling in the grasp of two stalwart Indians. In this time of peril Bill showed the natural heroism of his nature. His foot was on the gunwale, when he was seized, and putting forth all his strength, he gave the boat a vigorous shove, which sent it a dozen feet from the shore. Just then the moon struggled from behind a cloud and shed a mellow light upon the scene. Bill, pinioned by both arms, yet struggled fiercely, and the captain turned back to his aid.

"Keep off there!" he shouted. "Wha-a-t? Do you want to be taken, and leave the little gal alone? Let the old man take care of himself."

"You came to my aid. Shall I leave you in peril?" shouted Austen.

"You durned brute, kan't you help me more with your hands free than you can with 'em tied? Let up, you painted reptyle! What do you want to choke a man fur? Sheer off, capt'in. You kan't help me now, but jest trust the old man. He ain't liable to stay long with his hands tied."

"He gives good counsel in his singleness of heart," said Marstowe. "Push off a little, or we may get a flight of arrows."

They pushed off a few rods from the shore, and lay there, while a confused struggle and trampling on the sand told that the active guide was giving them a great deal of trouble. Angry cries were heard, and at last the whole party went down in a confused mass, from the midst of which, to their great delight, a single man arose and struggled free from the rest, and ran up the beach at full speed. In some way or other the guide had managed to throw off the hands which held him, and was off like the wind. A wild chorus of savage cries sounded, and the Indians trooped off up the sand, following close upon the track of the flying guide, who ran like a deer. Indeed, it was well known all along the border that Hungry Bill had beaten the best runners of the Onondaga and Mohawk nations, including the noted Fleetwing, in a race for a cup at Oswego. The men in pursuit were good runners too, one of them fully equal to Bill, and this man, holding his hatchet ready for a blow, was within six feet of him, straining every nerve to get within striking distance. Grasping his oars

the young captain rowed up the beach at his best speed. The course of the runners took them around the curved shore of a little bay, and the oarsman laid his course from point to point, and by this means was enabled to keep pace with the foremost runners, who were rapidly leaving the troop of yelling demons behind them. But the savage was gaining at every step, and it seemed to Austen that Bill had slackened his speed, while the Indian still kept his pace unchecked. The hatchet was raised, and about to descend upon the head of the ~~savages~~, when he suddenly threw himself at the feet of his enemy, and catching him by the ankles gave him a toss. The Indian described a parabolic curve in the air, and fell with his head upon a stone and lay senseless. Hungry Bill did not wait long to decide whether the enemy was dead or alive, for his other enemies were closing in upon him, but snatching the hatchet from his lifeless hand he ran on, shaking the glittering weapon in the air. The guide seemed a changed man. Every movement of his body, the gleam of his wild eye, bespoke the active, vigilant woodman. He bounded on, the hatchet still in his nervous grasp, looking over his shoulder now and then at his enemies, and calculating his chances. His short struggle with the swiftest runner, and the slackening of his speed in order to accomplish his purpose, had enabled the Indians to gain upon him, and three of them were laboring on, close in his rear, eager for his blood. They knew him now, and few men were more hated by the St. Regis than Hungry Bill. His course now led him up a slope, and he reached a bare bluff above the lake, twenty feet high, at the base of which the water lay dark and deep, seemingly of fathomless depth.

Here he turned at bay, and so noble was his attitude that the savages made a pause a few feet away as he stood upon the verge of the bluff, threatening them with the hatchet.

"Yield to the St. Regis," panted the foremost warrior. "So great a brave as Fleetfoot the Guide will be a prize of which to boast, when we go back to the village."

Hungry Bill, who understood their tongue, gave a contemptuous snort.

"Give up to you! The old man ain't quite ready."

As he said this he lifted his hatchet and hurled it at the

speaker with so true an aim that the savage dropped to the earth, with a red mark on his forehead. Hungry Bill uttered a wild laugh, and turning, plunged headlong from the bluff. The water closed over his head, while two hatchets whistled over the spot where he had stood.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT BILL HAD DONE.

THE savages ran up to the verge and looked down. There was a ripple in the water where he had disappeared, and as this subsided, they looked to see the guide rise to the surface, and some of the others, who had come up, waited to launch their tomahawks at his head. But he did not rise. Whether he had been wounded when he fell, or had hurt himself in falling from that great height, they did not know, but it seemed certain that the days of Hungry Bill had come to an end. Austen paused in dismay as he saw the water cease to circle about the spot where he had gone down, and thought that he had died for their sakes. The oars dropped into the water and he let the boat drift where she would, while he covered his face with his hands.

"Hyar, you," said a voice close to his ear. "What you doing? Help the old man in, for he's mighty tired, he is."

Austen extended his hand with a shout of joy and caught the hard hands of the trapper in his. "Brave fellow," he said, "I am glad you are saved. Get in quickly."

"Oh, git out now, will you?" said Bill, as he climbed over the gunwale. "No nonsense now; the old man won't stand it. Glad to git here, though. Pooh! I'm played out, I am. That Injin ran like the deuce. I hope he ain't dead though."

"How did you get here?"

"I s'pose you think nobody but you kan swim under water, eh? I'd like to swim ag'in' you once. It would be the liveliest time you ever see. Lord, how I did run. Did you see the old man wrastle them two Injins down? The

old man ain't no chicken, though he do have fits 'casionaly. What's on the ticket next?"

Bang!

A bullet glanced over the water, struck the bow of the boat and passed completely through it, within six inches of the spot where Bill sat. He put his finger in the hole made by the ball, with a derisive laugh.

"See thar. I believe my soul them Injins had jest as lieve shoot a man as not. I guess we'd better git out of this. It's rayther warm about hyar and the old man don't like it."

"What have you been doing?" said Marstowe. "Do not keep me in suspense."

"Let's git out of this first," said Bill, as another ball passed over the boat with a sharp whistle. "They keep pointing them guns this way. They do it a purpose, I do believe."

Austen took up the oars and put a good distance between them and the shore, while Bill sat watching the scene of his late encounter, as coolly as if it was an everyday occurrence, while the Indians danced frantically upon the shore and uttered direful threats against the guide, to which he only answered by a grin.

"Got bad tempers, the hull bilin' of 'em," he said. "Pull away, capt'in; down the lake. Keep well out; I've got another wrinkle in my head and I kain't rest till I git it out."

"But tell me what you have done already, Bill," said Marstowe. "I am on thorns until I know."

"Waal, let the cap row on while I tell you. I landed in the cave below here, and it was so beastly dark I couldn't see my hand. Not a very good time for a man who has got to tramp the woods up and down and them full of Injins, every one of 'em bilin' mad. You see they lay the death of them four critters that Chenango slewed to the old man, and that makes it bad for him. Waal, I managed to creep along till I heard voices, and seen the'r camp-fire blazing. They ain't afraid to light a camp-fire this side of the lake, 'cause the Oneidas are most of 'em gone down toward Johnstown this season, arter blankets and sich-like. I crawled up kind o' keerful, and I see that it was a big camp,

nigh on to forty of 'em in all, squatting round the fire smoking their darned old pipes. Bu'st 'em, they broke mine, but I've marked the man that did it, the identical rascal that I throwed the tomahawk at on the bluff. I hit him, too, bu'st him. He don't break the old man's pipe for nothing."

"Go on, go on," said Marstowe, in an impatient tone.

"Don't hurry the old man. Plenty of time to tell the story afore we dare to land. Keep off that pi'nt, capt'in. Thar's two of the red imps a-snaking up to git a shot at us. Have you got ary rifle in the boat? I left mine on the island."

"I brought it with me," said Marstowe. "I did not know but we might need it."

"Then hand it here," said Bill. "I calculate to teach that fust red nigger not to snake up to shoot off white humans. Give me that powder-horn. It's a long shot, but I guess I kan make him feel oneasy."

He primed the rifle carefully, and Austen ceased pulling for a moment when nearly abreast of the point. The savages who had drawn the attention of the guide were creeping stealthily forward, evidently with the intention of getting a shot at the boat as it passed. But they reckoned without their host if they meant to catch the guide napping, for his keen eyes saw every thing. The leading savage was lying partly concealed by a projecting log, but a prominent portion of his frame, that part which "Mark Twain" calls the "political economy" of a man, showed above a hollow in the log. Bill had hardly leveled the rifle when a stream of fire poured from the muzzle, and the report rung out across the water. Up leaped the Indian, stung to madness by the sudden and disgraceful nature of the wound, and clapping his hands to the injured part, danced wildly up and down, yelling like a very fiend, while Bill laid down his rifle, and indulged in a fit of laughter.

"That Injin won't set down easy for a month, that's this chap's candig apinium. You bet yer life he won't." (Cluck.)

"You didn't want to kill him, then?"

"Course not," (cluck.) "What did I want to kill him fur when I knew that shooting him thar will hurt him wuss than a ball through the heart. You bet." (Cluck, cluck, click !)

"Go on with your story, Bill," said Marstowe. "What did you find out concerning the masked chief?"

"Oh! Didn't I tell you? Waal, I laid behind a log, and pooty soon the cretter he come and set down on it along with a half-breed that I knowed, that lives among the St. Regis. A pizon critter he is too, ef ever I see one in my life. I'd give this rifle to hev dared to put my knife right thru his pizon karkiss, but sech is human natur' that I dassent do it. 'Twould hev bin ez much ez my life is worth. They had a long confab about some one that I judged had run away from Quebec about three year afore, and that they seemed bound to find. I didn't hear the name at fust, but arter a while I understood that he was called the Chevaleer Marly. I couldn't make out jest what he run away fur, but I did make out that the masked chief hates him like pizon, and wants to ketch him."

"Ha!" said Marstowe. "If it were not for that deformed shoulder of his I think I should know him. Did he seem to know where the Chevalier was hidden?"

"Pears as ef he suspected. What's the usa of hiding it? He has hern somewhere that an unknown man inhabits this island, and he has come here to find if it is the man he hates."

"Indeed?"

"He said he know'd he was hidden somewhar, and the gal with him. Seems that the Chevaleer had a gal with him too."

"I understand you, Bill. You think the Chevalier, whom this man pursues, is myself. Suppose it should be so, would that be any reason for you to withdraw your frierdship?"

"Not ef I am any way acquainted with myself, it ain't," replied the guide. "I'll stand by you. Thar ain't much for to tell. I heard 'em say that they'd sent out two spies to look over the island. I drawed off and give you the sign'. Did you hear it?"

"Yes."

"What come to them Injins?"

"One of them lies at the bottom of the lake, the other escaped."

"Yes, yes. Ah, the sights I have seen, and the fights I have fou't in the Injin kentry. No matter. You put me ashore. Then let the old gentleman take the boat back, and leave us two to take keer of ourselves. We kin do it, bet yer life."

After a little consultation they pushed the light boat into

the inlet of the stream, and here the guide and captain landed. The place where they reached the shore was so overhung by bushes that they could lie hidden from the sight even of a man standing on the bank directly over their heads.

"Why not leave the boat here and let all three set out on this expedition? You may need strength more than you have."

"No," said Bill. "You row out into the lake, and just abreast of the St. Regis campfire—you kin see it shining now—and lay thar till you hear the horned owl hoot. Like this."

He gave the note of the night-owl with such ludicrous exactness that the young captain looked up to see where the bird sat. This strange man was a perfect mocking-bird in this respect. He could imitate to perfection the note of any of the birds of the forest, or the cry of any of its beasts. He did not seem to think it any thing of a feat, either, or that there was a possibility of its being a cause of suspicion to the Indians.

"Never you mind what I'm going to do," said Bill. "It's something that must be done right now or we'll hev a hornet's nest about our ears. Rec'lect the signal, and don't have no foolishness about going with us now, 'cause I won't stand it. Now, capt'in, git out. Push off, Mr Marstowe; the old man wants to see you out of the creek safe."

Marstowe reluctantly consented, and paddled carefully out of the river, or creek, properly speaking, and left the two men standing alone upon the bank of the stream, under the overhanging boughs. It would not do to stay there if they meant to do any thing, however, and the two crept cautiously up the bank, for, though not as well posted in woodcraft as Hungry Bill, Austen was no tyro, and had tracked Indians before now.

"Come it easy," said Bill, with his mouth pressed against his companion's ear, sc that the whisper should not be heard. "Look out for sticks. The first you break means that we must get up and dust. Keep your eyes on me and don't say a word."

Austen nodded, and rising slowly, and keeping their bodies inclined, to catch the slightest sound, and to see that they stepped on nothing which might betray their whereabouts to the enemy, the two men crept cautiously forward. The campfire of the enemy gleamed before them, upon the bank of the

lake, and toward this the path led. Pushing silently forward, the sound of voices soon broke upon their ears, and a mournful chant, which the guide knew to be the death-song of a brave, broke the stillness. They knew that every one in the camp must join in the funeral ceremonies, and crept up unobserved, and saw that they had brought into the circle the man at whom Bill had hurled the tomahawk upon the bluff.

"His pipe is out," said Bill. "Wonder ef he'll break a man's pipe ag'in?"

To those who have never seen an Indian burial, there is something imposing in the highest degree. The body of the slain brave, in his war-paint, was rested upon a sort of platform in the middle of an open space, and around it, in solemn order, moved the stately procession, headed by the masked chief and the half-breed mentioned by Bill. Several women were in the procession, and marched with the braves, keeping up that mournful chant.

Bill touched his companion's arm, and signaled him to come on. He obeyed silently, and passing the spot where the Indian march was going on, they moved down the beach to a spot just below the place where Austen had his struggle with the masked chief. Upon this flat they saw a man standing, leaning upon a gun, keeping guard over something, though what it was the captain could not make out.

"You stay here," whispered Bill. "I'm arter that Injin, and ef he yells, you can save my sculp."

Bill darted up the bank and disappeared, while Austen crouched in the shadow of the bushes and waited. He saw the savage stand like a statue, looking out across the water, and thinking perhaps of his far-off land beyond the waters of the great lake, Ontario. He never dreamed of danger, for his comrades had brought him word that the man they most dreaded, Hungry Bill, was drowned. They had not seen him get into the boat when he escaped.

What did Bill design to do? How would he get at the savage without alarming him? The St. Regis stood a little in front of a tree, which grew out from the bank behind him in an oblique direction, as chestnut trees often grow upon the banks of our lakes and streams. It was summer weather, and the burs had not attained half their size, but were

annoying things to strike upon the bare flesh of a man. Presently Austen saw the savage start, and clap his hand angrily to his head, where one of the half-ripened burs had struck upon his bare crown. The angry muttering he made, and the savage look at the tree, showed that he thought the falling of the burs was the work of some mischievous squirrel or chipmuck.

"Chut!" he said, angrily, and leaned upon his gun as before. Presently another bur, larger than the last, bumped against his cheek, and with an angry cry he ran up to the tree, and struck upon it to drive out the mischievous occupant. This was precisely the end which the occupant desired, and a dark form dropped from the tree upon the head of the astonished savage, knocking him senseless to the earth. Before he had time to recover he was bound and gagged, and the guide signaled his companion to approach.

"What was your object in this?" said the young captain.

"Simply this yer. The masked chief has bin about yer longer than we think fur, and ef you don't believe it, look at this."

Lying upon the beach at their feet was a large raft, capable of holding thirty persons. It was built of logs of pine, bound together with fibrous roots, woven and interwoven between the logs, holding them tightly in their places. Smaller logs had then been split in half, and laid into the hollows of the larger logs, making the floor almost even. Take it all in all, it was ingeniously contrived, and could not have been the work of a few hours.

"He has been here a week," said Austen, examining the raft.

"So the old man thinks himself," said Bill. "Now then, I guess we kan't leave this raft hyar. Ef we do, they'll make it warm fur us before to-morrer mornin'."

"How shall we get it into the water?"

"Have a launch," said Bill. "I was down to Albany when they launched the 'Yager Boy,' the darnedest craft I ever see a floatin', jest as wide one way as she was the other. Look here."

Looking more carefully at the raft, the young captain saw that it had been built with a fixed plan, and was laid upon

split logs inclining to the water. All they had to do was to knock away the shores, and the launch was complete. Austen laughed lightly and picked up a heavy stick which lay by the side of the raft.

"The frst time I ever launched a ship," he said. "How that masked chief will roar when he sees that all his work has gone for nothing. Get on the other side and find a club."

"All right," said Bill.

"Are you ready?"

"Ready."

"Not quite," said a quiet voice. Both turned and saw the masked chief standing near, holding a pistol in each hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILL'S BASHFULNESS.

"ONE stupid moment motionless they stood," looking in each other's eyes, while the immovable figure of the masked chief stood there, the weapons leveled, and his dark eyes flashing fire through the holes in the mask. They knew that he had them at an advantage, for the first motion to touch a weapon would be death to one at least.

"I never allow myself to miss with a pistol at ten paces," said the mask, in the even, measured tones which spoke of intense anger. "What are you doing here?"

"Sort o' looking round," said Bill, putting on an appearance of indifference. "I don't think I hev the honor of knowing you, do I?"

"You will have that honor, and I doubt if you will appreciate it."

"Thankee, thankee. Good opiniums go a good ways, you know. I'm right glad you like my general gait. I— How do you like that!"

Bill had been talking to gain time, still holding the stick in his hand, with which he meant to pry away the raft. Lifting

it suddenly he pitched it with unerring aim at the head of the masked chief, who threw up his hands to avert the blow, and before he could recover he fell under a blow from the club of Austen. Snatching away his pistols, Austen laid them on the raft.

"Let's get her off as soon as we can," said he. "Off with her."

They struck away the shores and sprung upon the raft, which glided down the slide into the water, and far out into the lake just as the masked chief bounded to his feet, pealing out a startling war-cry.

"I wish we had dared to wait and take that fellow with us," said Austen. "Give the signal for Marstowe at once."

Bill sounded the cry of the owl and the boat of Marstowe soon boarded the raft. He expressed the utmost surprise when he saw it, and understood at once what an awkward instrument it would have been in making an assault upon the island. "I have to thank you so many times that I am at a loss for words, Bill," said he. "When shall I be able to repay you for what you are doing for me and mine?"

"I'll quit you ef you don't shet up," roared Bill. "I ain't going to be bothered to death this way. It's as much as a man's life is worth, and I don't git no peace. Gimme that oar, and tie the boat to the raft. We've got to take her over to the island."

Seeing that the worthy guide was determined not to be thanked, the old gentleman gave it up and assisted them in paddling the raft to the island, and bringing it into the little cove where they secured it and landed.

"Who goes there?" cried a sweet voice.

"Friends with the countersign," said Marstowe, fondly.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign," was the merry reply, and Perdita stepped out of the shadow of the trees. Her father kissed her. "That is the countersign," he said.

"Shall I give it also?" said Austen.

"Upon my word, sir!" said Perdita. "No, I think not. Let my father give it for you."

"And look here, miss," said Bill. "Ef you tell me to take this young man by the neck and drop him into the

water there, the old man is ready to do the job, or bu'st something trying."

"What for, Bill?" demanded Perdita, merrily.

"What fur; what fur? Didn't the darned brute offer to kiss you? I'm sp'iling fur a chaince to lick some one and I'd a letté ruther lick him than not."

"Thank you," said Perdita. "You shall kiss me if you like, you dear creature. I am sure you have done every thing for us."

"What!" roared Bill, flushing to the very tips of his ears. "Now quit that, you. What's the use of plaguing the old man. You don't think I'd kiss a gal, do you?"

"Would you kiss me, if I asked you?" said Perdita, wickedly, approaching her merry face very close to his.

"G'way!" shouted Bill, desperately. "Don't; darn it, don't. You plague me, and I take to the woods, now that's a fact. The old man ain't used to it."

"I never thought you would refuse me," said Perdita. "I have no other way to reward you."

"Condemit!" yelled Hungry Bill. "Git away! Darn a woman, anyhow; they ain't no right in the woods. Lemme 'lone, will you?"

The embarrassment of the guide was so obvious and his blushes so vivid that a general laugh passed round the circle, which stung Bill to madness, and casting a look of fury at his fair tormentor, he darted into the woods in the direction of the hut in which Chenango had been lying when they first visited the island. Hungry Bill was famous for his bashfulness all along the Mohawk, and it was related of him that, when living at home, when a boy, the appearance of any neighboring female was enough to cause him to take to the woods.

"You will frighten him away," said the captain, endeavoring to restrain his laughter. "When you approach Bill in that way he is taken upon his weak side. I'll go and speak to him."

"Well, tell him he need not kiss me if he objects so strenuously," said the young lady.

"Or perhaps he would prefer to have it done by proxy. In which case he could readily find a volunteer who—"

"You git out," replied the guide, returning to his old whimsical manner. "I guess you've done it already. Now go back and bring me my powder-horn and rifle. I forgot 'em when I came away."

"All right," said Austen. "Any thing else?"

"Waal, ef you could manage to bring me a morsel of something to eat, I'd like *that*."

"Oh; are you hungry again?"

"You bet I am; dreffully."

Austen laughed, and went back to the party, and they entered the cave together. They found the chief much stronger, and sitting up on his blankets. He received them with a grave bow, and a stately grace which sets well upon the native chief.

"My heart tells me that the gray-haired chief has done much to give back strength to Chenango," he said. "Is it not so?"

"Next to Bill Epps, you owe him your life," replied Austen, disregarding the gestures of Marstowe, who would not have had his good deeds spoken of. "Perhaps more to him than to Epps, because his skill was greater."

"This man than is my father," said the chief, rising, and placing the hand of Marstowe upon his heart. "Let him take the thanks of the Indian, for he was kind when the chief had no claim upon him."

"Let Chenango make haste and get strong again, for the red wolves howl about the wigwam of the Gray Hair," said Austen, adopting the figurative language of the Oneida.

"Ha! Dare the wolves of the St. Regis prowl about the house of the Gray Hair? Let them fear the wrath of the Oneidas, the strong men of the Six Nations. What chief leads the St. Regis to battle?"

"The masked chief."

"Ugh!" said the Oneida. "Then let my father put a hatchet into the hand of Chenango, and he will go forth and slay the white chief of St. Regis."

"When you are stronger. The masked chief can not come to us here, and after three suns Chenango can go out to battle. Until then, let him rest in peace."

"It is well," replied the chief. "Chenango will listen to the words of the young war-chief, for he speaks good words."

Three days passed and they heard nothing of the masked

chief. The capture of the raft had been a damaging blow to them, and Austen knew that it would take some days to make another of the same kind. Bill Epps remained in the hut by himself most of the time, though Chenango spent some hours each day with him, maturing plans for the defense of the old man and his beautiful daughter. Each day the girl showed more and more the natural graces of soul which were hers, and Laurence Austen plunged more and more into the mazes of that mad passion of love, but did not speak of it. He was certain that this girl was born in another sphere of action, for she had read much and traveled in lands of which he had only heard and read. They had a few choice books in the cave, and the two would sit upon the rocky headlands, screened from the view of those on shore, and read from those rare old poets, which both loved so well, and enjoy it too, in spite of the cloud which threatened them. She would not speak of her past life, though he hinted at it often.

"Do not ask me of that," she said at length. "It would not become my father or myself to boast of what we have been or of the glories of other days. Enough that it is past and in all human probability we shall never mingle in the society of which my father was once the pride and boast."

"You fear this masked chief? Do you know him?"

"I can not tell. My father is in doubt too, and perhaps after all he does not seek us. Perhaps our fears are not well founded."

"Can you think of any one whose interest it is to find you?"

"I can think of one whose interest it is that we should be buried from the world, and who would rejoice to know that the last of the race had found a quiet grave, from which they could never rise to give him pain. But, why could he not let us rest? My father would never have troubled him, and we would have lived out our lives in quiet, happy in each other's love. I can not think that he is the one, nor is he like the man you describe as the masked chief."

On the afternoon of the fourth day after the capture of the raft, she was sitting alone in a secluded part of the island,

toward the lower end, and under a great tree, from which she could look out across the beautiful lake dotted here and there by islands of varied sizes, covered with verdant foliage. It was a beautiful day and a light breeze just stirred the surface of the lake and sighed through the foliage over her head. The rest of the party were busy upon another part of the island and not likely to disturb her. The balmy air, the murmur of the wind and the song of birds lulled her into rest, and she dropped her head upon a mossy knoll and fell asleep. One hand was thrown up to cover her face from the sunrays, and the other rounded limb was underneath her head, and there she slept, afole. She did not hear the low dip of the paddle coming up from the opposite direction from that in which she had looked for the enemy, and she slept on, unconscious, until a canoe grounded upon the gravelly beach and was drawn up on the sand. Then a head was raised cautiously above the bank, and the masked chief appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER IX.

A VILLAIN'S WAY.

BILL EPPS was in a rage. Something had happened to distract the even tenor of his way, and that something was the railing of Captain Austen, who accused him of being in love with a Dutch girl upon the Mohawk at Schenectady. It made no difference whether this was true or not, Hungry Bill would have resented it just the same, and would have denied it up hill and down dale, as he did in the present case.

"Now, Bill," said Austen, on the morning of the fourth day after the capture of the raft, with a sly wink at Perdita, who was standing near, "don't deny it. I know you are in love with the Dutch girl; everybody says you are."

"Then everybody is a darned liar," roared Bill. "I don't even *know* any gal. See here: you want to pick a muss with me."

"No I don't, Bill. I'll tell all I know about it, and leave Miss Perdita to be the judge between us. It was at Schenectady, about four or five months ago, and I was walking on the banks of the Mohawk, when who should I see but Bill Epps and Katrine Vanderdonk. They were sitting on a log, and just as I came up he put his arm around her waist, and kissed her, and—"

"Liar, liar!" shouted Bill, desperately; "the infarnalest liar I ever see."

"Katrine saw me just in time, and gave Bill a slap in the face that nearly knocked him into the river. 'Dere,' she said, 'dat vill deach you not to dry to *pite me* again.'

"Oh, suffering Jerushia!" said Bill, dragging off his coat, "peel off yer rags, Capt'in Austen. I've stood a good deal from you, but the old man can bear no more. Clean off them rags quick, and wade in. Hop up to me once. Ya-a-a-a-ip! I'm the painted catamount of the Mohawk, the Big Avenger of the North Woods. Yip, yip, yip! ya-a-a-h! Put up yer hands, do."

"Oh, get away, Bill," said Austen, giving him a push. "What nonsense? Do you think I am going to fight in the presence of a lady?"

"Didn't you insult the old man in her presence, say?"

"I never knew that it was an insult to tell that a man kissed a pretty Dutch girl."

"But it's a lie—a durned lie. I never did it in my life. I couldn't."

"Well, have it your own way."

"I shall be jealous, Bill," said Perdita. "I know now why you would not kiss me the other day."

"Blessed martyrs! you'll drive the old man mad between you. I ain't kissed nobody. Does you hear? I do hope them Injins will come and take this yer party. 'Twould please me mighty well, that would."

"I don't believe that, Bill," said Perdita.

"Waal, all right; I quit ye all to-day. I've labored to git along with ye, but I kain't do it. Say, will you lend me your boat to go arter my canoe?"

"Certainly, Bill. Good-by," said Perdita. "I hope you will get safe to the settlements. Shake hands before you go,

for you have been very kind to us, and we shall never forget it."

"Darn my buttons ef the gal ain't tuk the old man at his word. Look here, you don't think so hard of me as that, do you? You don't believe the old man would leave you in trouble? It ain't his gait. I'll quit you as soon as I git you all safe, though, for a-lying about the old man. Come along, you. I want you to go and help me git my canoe."

"What do you want with it?"

"Some of those pesky natyves will be coming over hyar in it some of these nights, and I don't keer to be shot from behind a bush, I don't. Now whar's that boat, miss?"

She sprung away to get it, and soon appeared upon the shore, coming from some unknown hiding-place where the boat lay. The two went down, and though she pleaded hard to go with them, they would not allow it.

"We may have to go to places where bullets fly like hail," said Austen, "and I would not risk one hair of your head for untold wealth."

Perdita blushed deeply and turned away, and it was after this that the masked chief found her asleep beneath the tree, dreaming of the gallant young captain. Bill was in a bad humor, and when in that mood, did not care much into what danger he ran, but sat in the stern of the boat, glowering at Austen, and thinking over the grievance of the Dutch girl, Katrine Vanderdonk.

"See here, Capt'in Larry," he said, "do I know any Dutch girl in Dorrup?"

"How should I know?"

"Didn't you tell that little gal I did?"

"That was poetic license. They say poets can embellish the truth, and I am a poet."

"Is 'poic' the English of 'big liar,' capt'in?" said Bill, innocently. "'Cause if it is, you are the biggest poic in the world. You be, by gravy, and I don't keer who knows it."

"Take care, Bill, we are getting close in to the shore."

"You be—the *darnedest* poic in the wild waste of the united airth. Stiddy; like ez not we'll git a dozen balls through us ef we try to land, though I think most of them Injins are up above thar now."

The place in which Bill had left his canoe was upon the northern side of the lake, far above the Indian camp, and he had taken no pains to hide it. Austen was rowing, and Bill steering with one of the extra oars, for the boat carried two pair. They rounded the point behind which Bill had left his canoe, and immediately that person began to swear like a pirate, much to the surprise of Austen.

"What is the matter?"

"Matter! matter enuff! Some uneasy villain has stole my canoe. I know'd it; I know'd they'd steal the old man's canoe, bu'st 'em."

"You should have hidden it."

"Did I hev time? Oh, merry Moses! I'm so 'tarnal mad I'd like to bu'st something. Blame his old head that done it."

"We may as well go back," said Austen. "No use crying for spilled milk."

They pulled back, and as they rounded the point of the island and neared the spot where they had left Perdita, the face of Austen blanched, and touching his companion on the arm, he pointed to a canoe, which was moving slowly through the water just in front, containing two persons, the masked chief and Perdita.

How was it done?

With a caution and celerity which spoke well for his forest training the masked chief drew himself up the bank and reached the side of the sleeping girl, who lay slumbering in beauty, her fragrant breath just stirring the clustering hair which lay upon her cheek. The man paused and stood over her with folded arms, looking down upon her. His fingers opened and closed in a strange, nervous way, as if he restrained some mighty passion. Then he drew a long, keen-bladed dagger from his belt and stooped over her. Would he slay her, this beautiful child? Could he have the heart to take this sweet young life? Evidently he hesitated what to do, but at length he dropped his broad hand upon her mouth and nostrils, so that she could not cry out, and held the dagger suspended above her with the other.

"Hush!" he muttered, hoarsely. "If you value your life, do not dare to speak."

"Would you kill me?" she gasped.

"If you force me to do it. Do you think the life of one woman would stand between me and my object? Pah; you do not know me. Come."

"What would you do?"

"Come, I say. Do you take me for a fool? You must go with me to the mainland."

"I will not."

"Living or dead; take your choice."

"Kill me if you will, I will not go with you."

A look of demoniac fury gleamed in the eyes of the masked chief. Twice he lifted the dagger and as often the look of undaunted firmness in the eyes of this brave girl stopped him, and he thrust the knife into his belt and caught her in his arms.

"The devil take me if you shall not do as I desire," he said angrily. "Come away. I am your master."

Releasing her mouth for a moment the girl screamed twice, as loudly as she could. Her voice was heard, and there rung out clear and loud upon the afternoon air the war-cry of the Oneida, and they heard Chenango coming at full speed. With a bitter curse, the mask lifted his clenched hand and dashed it into the face of the girl with stunning force, and then, placing her in the canoe, he thrust it away from the shore, and grasping the paddle gave half a dozen heavy strokes, which sent him clear of the island just as Chenango, wild with rage, bounded out upon the point of the island in full view of the scene.

"White dog," he screamed, "shaking his hatchet in the air, "stay and meet the Oneida. Coward, do you fear me?"

"Ha! ha! ha! My worthy chief, let those laugh who win. But you should have brought your rifle."

"A coward wars upon women; a great brave strikes at men," cried Chenango.

"Thank you. I think the cowards strike the nobler prey. I give you good-day, my brave Oneida. We shall meet again."

"Hark, white dog with a black heart," shrieked Chenango. "Do no harm to the beautiful child, nor insult her by a word, for if you do, Chenango, the Oneida, will follow you by

night and day, even into the lodges of the St. Regis, to shed your coward blood."

"Bah," replied the masked chief, fiercely. "To the devil with you. I am no coward, not I; neither will I peril the safety of my enterprise for the sake of a combat with you now. But I tell you, red dog that you are, that a time may come when I shall make you repent your insults to me this day."

"Come back, then, and fight," roared the chief, who was almost beside himself with fury. "Do not make yourself a dog when you may be a brave. Come back, and if you slay me, you conquer one who is a chief of his nation."

The only reply was a shot from a pistol, but in his excitement the masked chief missed his aim, though the ball just grazed the cheek of the chief. Before he could draw a second pistol Chenango sunk behind the bushes, out of reach of a bullet, and the renegade took up his paddle and sent the light canoe through the water with rapid strokes.

"Curse the Indian," he growled. "Did he dare to insult me? I will have his heart's blood for those bitter words. However, I have carried my point so far that Perdita is in my power."

She had recovered from the blow he had dealt her, and sat in the bottom of the boat looking at him angrily.

"You may thank yourself that I was forced to use you so harshly," said the mask. "You made me wild with your obstinacy. Now that I have you in a place where your obstinacy can do no harm, I will be as mild as any lamb and your temper may have full sway."

"Who are you?" she said.

"I am what I am," was the reply. "I do not propose to tell you now. It is enough that I sought you out and found you, and my mission is in part accomplished. I have my reasons for this, and I think them good ones, and so you will think when I explain. There is one thing I do not mind to tell you, and that is that I propose to make you my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Precisely. I surprise you, doubtless. You do not understand how a man of my capacity should seek out a forest maiden like yourself to marry her. But stranger things

have happened, and are happening every day. When we are married—”

“ You are a villain.”

“ Any thing else ?” he said, paddling slowly forward.

“ Yes ; I will add to it. An impudent villain.”

“ Ah. You flatter me, mademoiselle. Positively you do make me proud. Have you any other pet names you would like to call me ? Believe your mind if it is any pleasure to you. Perish the base wretch who would stop a woman’s tongue when its clack can do him no harm.”

“ You insult me. Take me back to the island.”

“ Hardly. I have traveled too far to get you to give you up easily. Do not be foolish, my fair maiden. It is mere folly to ask this of me.”

“ Then you will not take me back.”

“ Any thing in reason I will do. You ask too much.”

“ Do you know who I am ?” she cried.

“ That stately attitude shows the old blood,” he said, with a look of admiration. “ Yes, I know who you are, mademoiselle.”

“ And is it for *that* you wish to marry me ?”

“ You are a young lady of great penetration. It is for that and nothing else that I desire to marry you. Then you have great personal attractions, independent of that reason.”

“ Then the day of our power is come, and you seek to take advantage of it. Listen to me, sir. You spoke just now of my pride of race, and you spoke the truth. No woman of any nation is prouder than the women of my family, and they have good cause. They come from a long and noble line, *sans puer et sans reproche*, and that line shall never be sullied by me. You may kill me, burn me at the stake, offer any bloody death you may, but you can not force me to marry you.”

“ Can I not ?”

“ No priest will perform the ceremony.”

“ You think so. We shall see.”

At this moment he heard a sound which caused him to look up with a start, and there, within a hundred yards of him, he saw the boat of Perdita, rowed by Captain Austen and Bill Epps, their eyes wild, their pulses bounding, and a savage determination upon their set faces. He uttered a cry of surprise

and laid out his tremendous strength in sending the canoe through the water, wild with the fear that his prize should be wrung from him, even when in his grasp. The water foamed under the bow of the light craft, and she seemed to leap through the water, while a savage cry from the pursuing boat told that the men who followed were eager for his blood.

Perdita was appalled by the strange gleam which shone in the eyes of her enraged escort. She could not see his face, but those eyes spoke a desperate resolve, and she knew that in the event of their being overtaken by the pursuing boat she was doomed. He had taken out his dagger, and held it in his teeth, looking at her from time to time as the splash of the coming oars sounded louder and louder in their ears. She looked at Austen's face as it was turned over his shoulder, and it was grand. He lashed at the water with the might of a giant. She saw that they had laid their weapons where they could easily touch them, and were ready for the struggle when it came. Nearer and nearer yet came the pursuing boat, and each moment the wild light in the eyes of the masked chief became fiercer.

"Keep up your courage," cried Austen. "We will save you, Perdita."

"Will you?" cried the masked chief. "It is not in your power. You have not caught me yet."

"But we will," replied Austen, for scarcely six boat's lengths separated the two crafts. "Lay down to it, Bill. Break your back or catch him."

At this moment Perdita took matters into her own hands. She had been watching the progress of events, and ready to act when the right time came. Springing up suddenly, she gave him a sudden push, sending him completely out of the canoe. Then, seizing the paddle, she pushed rapidly away from him, and reached the other boat, into which she sprung.

"Don't wait," cried Bill. "Pull back, for our lives!"

CHAPTER X.

PERDITA WOUNDED.

THE warning did not come a moment too soon. They had pulled the head of the boat round, and were already in rapid motion away from the land, when a volley from a dozen rifles and several arrows rattled all about them, knocking the splinters out of the light craft. There was no time to pay any attention to the masked chief, who was swimming rapidly toward the shore. As he heard the volley he turned and looked toward the boat, and uttered an angry cry as he saw that all the occupants were unharmed, though some of the balls had whistled surprisingly near some of the party. Foaming with rage he sprung out of the water, and snatching a rifle from an Indian who was about to fire, he leveled it at the boat, and pulled the trigger. Perdita uttered a faint moan, and sunk down in the bottom of the boat, while the masked chief, who had not meant the shot for her, but for Austen, threw his hands up to his face and fell to the ground.

"Row on, row on!" moaned Perdita, as Austen made a motion to lay down his oar. "Get out of danger before you touch me."

"A coward shot," murmured the young man, as he threw all his force upon the oar, until it almost cracked. "I will pay you for that some day; be sure of that."

His lips were white with imperfectly restrained rage, and he kept his head until the scattering fire of the savages could no longer harm them, when he laid down his oar and lifted the form of Perdita in his arms, moaning in pain, while the blood dropped from her wounded arm. The lips of the young man moved as he saw this, but no sound issued from them. Bill Epps had seen him in anger before now, but never had he looked so terrible as when he sat supporting the woman he loved in his strong arms. Bill rowed on desperately, for he knew that nothing they could do would be of much avail, and her father's skill might be baffled by their ignorant though well-meant efforts.

"Lay her down, captain," said he. "'Tain't no use to try any thing now. The oar is the only thing for you."

"She will bleed to death," said Austen, sullenly, looking into her white face.

"Can you hinder the bleeding? Don't stop to fool. The oars, the oars."

Austen again took his place, and the boat sprung at every powerful stroke. Two such men, pulling with the energy of despair, make quick time upon the water, and she fairly flew, while a track of foam followed in her wake. As they neared the shore they saw Marstowe and Chenango standing upon the bank, watching them eagerly. As the boat struck the beach, the old man saw the bleeding form of his daughter, and with a cry which was scarcely human, sprung down the bank.

"She is dead, she is dead! Oh, my darling, my darling, have I brought you to this?"

"Hush, father," said Perdita, opening her eyes. "I am in God's hands and yours. Save me if you can."

As she said this she fainted from loss of blood, and the old man tried to lift her, but trembled as if in a palsy.

"Let me carry her," said Austen hoarsely. "Run on and get your instruments."

"You carry her?" said the father. "She is mine."

"But I love her," replied Austen, "and God do so to me and more also as I will take my revenge of the assassin who pointed the rifle at her heart."

Marstowe turned and ran up the bank with the vigor of a boy, while Austen followed more slowly, carrying the girl in his arms. The canoe was floating half-way between the island and the mainland, and the Indians were already making preparations to swim out for it. Chenango touched the guide on the shoulder, and pointed to them.

"I understand, Chenango," said Bill. "The old man is with you. Leave the gal in the care of her father, for if she can be saved, who can save her except him? Git in."

The chief took his place in the bow, and Bill took the oars. The Indians, comprehending their purpose, began to yell in a frightful manner, but the men in the boat were old Indian-fighters, and no amount of yelling, unaccompanied by acts, would deter them from any purpose. If they did not get the

canoe, they left it in the power of the savages to cross at any moment, two or three at a time, and in their present position that would not do.

"Hark to them, the murdering fiends," said Bill, as he rowed hard for the canoe. "Git a paddle and sit in the stern, Chenango. We must have that canoe."

Seeing their determination, the masked chief resolved to defeat it, if possible. The canoe was within easy range of the shore, and the boat could not approach without great peril to the occupants. Two or three light logs were rolled into the water, and six or eight of the St. Regis plunged in, and pushing the logs before them, swam toward the canoe, which, under the force of a light wind blowing from the shore, was rapidly drifting out of range. Chenango saw this with a grim smile of approbation, and knew that the Indians with the logs must swim hard to catch the canoe. But, when a hundred yards separated the boat and the canoe, and the logs were twenty yards away, they saw the plumed head of a savage disappear beneath the surface, and knew that he meant to swim under water to the canoe. If he reached it before them, he would certainly get back to his comrades before they could touch him, for the paddle was still in the bottom.

"Hard, Fleetfoot, quick!" cried Chenango, startled out of his native stoicism by the imminence of their danger.

"Steer dead for the canoe!" roared Bill. "I'll show him. Let the canoe alone, you painted reptile. Ha!"

Just then the head of the savage popped out of the water within three feet of the canoe. Chenango dropped his right hand to his side, and detaching his hatchet, threw his hand suddenly backward. A ray of light seemed to flash from the boat to the head of the St. Regis. That ray of light was the hatchet of Chenango, hurled with unerring aim. The St. Regis threw up his hands and sunk with a bubbling cry, while the water was crimsoned by his flowing blood.

At the same moment the boat struck the other canoe, and detaching his right-hand oar, Bill Epps stood up, and dashed the heavy handle half a dozen times through the thin bark of which it was formed. It filled and sunk immediately. Dropping instantly to his seat, he found that the quick-witted chief had understood him, and pulled the head of the boat round so

that it pointed directly toward the island, and they lost no time in getting out of the way of the St. Regis, who were not ten feet distant when the head of the boat was pulled round by the paddle of the Oneida. Indeed, so close were they that one strong savage made a desperate stroke or two, and laying his hand upon the gunwale of the boat, tried to overturn her. Perhaps he might have succeeded, but Chenango raised his paddle and brought the edge down upon the exposed hand. With a moan of pain the savage released his hold, and but for the aid of his companions, would have followed the first man to the bottom. All this had happened upon the extreme limit of long-range shots, but the St. Regis did not dare to trust their rifles at that distance and Bill soon put the boat out of danger. The canoe was gone and their work well done.

"Ugh!" said Chenango. "All good, Fleetfoot. That well done."

"Bet yer life!" said Bill. "Let's git back to the island, for the wind is rising and this child thinks we are going to have a big blow."

The Indian glanced at the sky and nodded expressively. They understood the signs in the air. The clouds hung low and muttered. The wind was rising in fitful gusts and the water fowl were seeking shelter among the reeds and ferns along the bank. In the west a dark bank of clouds were rolling slowly up, and an unnatural calmness fell upon the lake.

"This yer will give us time to think about it," said Bill, "and to cure the little gal, if it's a possible thing. See yer, Chenango, ef yon gal dies you and the old man will have a work to do."

"I have said it," replied Chenango. "Even in the midst of the St. Regis lodges, with his chiefs by his side and his warriors about him, I will slay the man who calls himself the masked chief. Let Fleetfoot speak, and say that this shall be so."

"I have spoken," said Bill, solemnly, in the Oneida tongue, which he spoke better than his own. "Let it be so. And now—" falling back into bad English, "let's go and see the keetle gal. I hope she may do well."

"She shall live, if the love of her father can make her," said the Indian, "and his love is very great."

As he spoke the boat struck the land and they drew her up on the beach and walked toward the cavern home of Marstowe, and touching the spring, the manner of which Marstowe had explained to them, they entered. Marstowe rose to receive them and took the hand of Bill Epps in his own.

"Congratulate me, my friend," he said, joyfully. "My child will not die."

Bill Epps waved his left hand over his head and went through the motions of a cheer without uttering a sound, for he knew that the girl must be weak from loss of blood, and he would not have caused her pain for untold wealth.

"Friend, did you say?" he said. "Did you call this old man friend? I'll desarve it at your hands. Don't say nothing more, or you will make a fool of Bill Epps and git him to blubbering."

Marstowe only answered by a slight pressure of the hand, and then led the guide into the other room, where Perdita lay upon a pile of robes laid upon soft moss, pale as death but looking hopeful. Bill Epps passed the sleeve of his hunting shirt across his eyes, and then blew his nose violently to cover the demonstration.

"Thar, thar, little 'un; don't you say a word. You git well just as soon as you can and make no foolishness. I hope you'll believe this old man when he says he'd rather lay thar than see you hurt. He would, by gravy."

"I know you would," said Perdita, in a weak voice. "I am not strong enough to thank you as you deserve, my good friend, but I will some time."

"Do not agitate yourself, Perdita," said Marstowe. "My poor, pale darling."

"Dod rot his old hide that did it," growled Bill. "I'll make him weep like a child for this! I can give you good news, though. Chenango and I have jest gone out and busted that canoe, so that they can't git at us with *that*, again."

"Good!" said Marstowe. "I thank you, Chenango. Bill has so often put as under obligation to him that I am almost ashamed to thank him."

"Then don't worry yerself to do it," growled Bill. "Don't act foolish, now. I wanted to save my own scalp, I guess."

The old man smiled and the party moved out of the room, and Bill took that time to inform them of the approaching storm. "You'd better tell the gal," he said, "so that she won't be skeered when the wind begins to roar. In an hour from this Satan himself wouldn't dare to cross the lake to the island, and ef it's in a state for anybody to cross this three days to come, then I'm a sucker. It's going to be the durnedest blow you ever see'd. Ain't it, Chenango?"

"The spirit of the storm is abroad," replied Chenango. "He will ride the lake in his canoe for three suns and moons."

"Excellent," said Marstowe. "And that will give us an opportunity to perfect our plans; eh, Bill?"

"Right you are!" said Bill. "How was the little gal hurt?"

"The ball hit her in the shoulder and struck the bone and glanced so that it is a flesh wound after all, for the bone was not splintered. I thank God that I turned my attention to surgery early, for it has been of use to me in this trying time."

"Hark!" said Bill.

Even in the depths of the cavern they could hear a sullen roar, deepening at each moment, and they knew that the storm was upon them in its fury.

"Come outside," said Bill, "and you will see a sight you never see before in all your lives. It's worth looking at."

"Let me speak to my daughter first," said Marstowe, "and then I am with you."

He was gone but for a moment and then followed the guide into the open air, and out upon the headland. There they saw a sight which they could never forget, even to their dying day.

Chaos was about them. The air was filled with leaves and small branches hurled here and there by the furious wind sweeping up the lake from the west, through the long valley in which it lay. The waves were rising rapidly, each moment increasing in size, and chasing each other in long lines, each rank crowned by a sheet of dazzling foam. The

sky was murky and the clouds hung low. The forest upon the other bank was seen to rock and bend, and now and then some great monarch of the forest, whose foundations had been sapped years ago, came crashing down, with a shock which seemed to shake the very island. The trees upon the headlands where they stood were small, so that there was no danger to them and they could enjoy the grand scene.

"Magnificent," said Austen. "I never saw any thing like it in all my life."

"The spirit of the storm rides on the blast and directs its course," said Chenango.

"How Perdita would enjoy this," said Marstowe.

"I can add something better," said Bill. "This will make them durned St. Regis hunt for thar holes. That's the best thing I can see in it. Seems as ef some of 'em won't git hurt."

The storm seemed to increase in violence. Stronger trees came crashing down, some torn up by the roots and some broken off from the parent stem fifteen feet above the ground. Every man was silent now, gazing silently upon the grand scene before them. In the presence of such a scene as this, man feels his own feebleness and the strength and glory of the Creator of all things. The waves, as they struck the headland, divided into thin spray, which the wind carried inland, and they were covered with the flying vapor.

"This is gitting monotonous," said Bill. "I guess we'd better hunt our holes."

"I shall stay here," said Austen. "At least for a little time. I never saw a sight like this in my life."

"No; and mou't be you'll never see it ag'in. I don't keer; I've got enuff of it and I'm going into the hole."

Chenango and Austen remained upon the bluff, watching the grand panorama before them. The Indian seemed to revel in this scene. His nostrils dilated and his eyes sparkled at each new sign of the strength of the elements. He stood with folded arms facing the storm, while his person was drenched by the blinding spray. All at once he turned, and laying his hand upon the arm of the young man, gave his idea of the Creator

"The Manitou is here," he said.

The young man bowed his head, and then uttered a cry, and pointed with his hand.

CHAPTER XI.

STORM-PLOTS.

A FLASH seemed to light up the bank in front, and, as if by magic, a stream of flame shot up to the top of a blasted pine and began to spread among the trees around and through the dry underbrush. Whatever had started the flame, whether the Indian camp-fire, a pipe, or spontaneous combustion, it is impossible to say, but in a few moments the forest seemed wrapped in flames, which rolled and spread, catching at the resinous pines and larches, crawling like fiery serpents along dry limbs, and lapping out tongues of flame to catch at any combustible object. A chorus of wild cries told that the Indians did not appreciate this strange occurrence, and by the light of the blazing forest, many of them could be seen darting in frantic haste into the water, willing to trust that element rather than the more dreaded one which threatened them. The flames rolled on, increasing more, but leaving that part of the forest untouched upon the western side of the creek, and in this the savages, as soon as they could escape, found refuge.

"The Manitou is angry," said the young chief, covering his face. "I will cover my head with ashes, for the calamity he has brought upon the Oneidas. It is very sad."

They turned back and entered the cave, leaving the two elements to work their will upon land and water. The forest men were right in their conjectures. For three days the storm continued, but on the afternoon of the third, toward evening, it began to abate, and by twelve o'clock the lake was again calm.

By this time Perdita was able to be about, though she carried her arm in a sling, and was pale from the loss of blood

and consequent exhaustion. As night came on and the wind began to lull, the guide began to show signs of uneasiness. He had fits of nervousness, and was continually going out to look at the sky and see that the Indians were not yet upon their way to assail them. Knowing something of the determined character of the masked chief, he was certain that he had not been idle during these three days, and had by this time formed some means to reach the island. And he was right.

During the first day of the storm the masked chief had lain concealed under an overhanging rock, safe from the falling branches and where the flames could not reach him, cursing the unlucky fortune which had brought the storm at such an inopportune moment. The man was ill at ease, for he had seen the girl sink down when he aimed the rifle at Austen, and knew that he had hit her. Was she dead? Had his hand the guilt of that innocent blood? He shuddered and plucked impatiently at the mask which covered his face. While lying there he was joined by the half-breed mentioned by Hungry Bill as being with him. This mad's character furnished little which was interesting. He was simply a blood-thirsty, mercenary wretch, a good tool in the hands of an unscrupulous man, but nothing more, and we have given him no prominence in the story. His name was Louis Gerard among the French, and he was called "La Loup" by the Indians.

This sinister companion took a seat under the rock, a little way from the mask, looking at him in a covert way.

"Have you given up the chase, *mon ami*?" he said, slowly.

To the devil with you, Gerard! Do you come here to gloat over me, to make sport of my misfortunes? Life of my body, man, you will not be well received among the St. Regis when you return, and tell them that we have not even brought back a single scalp."

"I am not the leader," said the half-breed, quietly. "Bah, say in so many words that you have given up the task, and let me work."

"Devil! you know that I have *not* given up, nor can I. I must marry this girl, if she lives, because that would be the

worst way. I must kill her father, if she is dead, for I can not lose the great stake I am playing for."

"Good! Now you are yourself again. I can take pleasure in your society. But, upon my word, that was an unlucky shot of yours yesterday."

"Was it not? My heart stood still when I saw where my bullet had found rest. Soul of my body, the girl has trusty guards. Do you think she cares for that young captain?"

"Do I? *Certainement!* She can not choose but like him. He is handsome, brave, generous. The first and the last you can lay no claim to, so that we can count his attributes two to your one."

"You are tired of life and want me to kill you, friend Louis," said the mask, rising on his elbow. "I shall take the utmost pleasure in performing that little task if you dare to provoke me; so bear in mind my admonition, and be very careful. Do you think the girl is dead?" .

"How should I know? I saw her fall, and that is all I know of it. Then, as you do not give up the task, we must work. Curse the wind! It blows as if the devil was in it, and the St. Regis are getting afraid. They say the Manitou is angry, and want to go back to Canada. You must watch them, or some of those fine days they will leave you in the lurch."

"That girl's face is always before me," muttered the mask. "Why could I not hold my hand? She is beautiful, talented, and a true daughter of our race, and would have made a noble partner in the state I shall hold."

"Ay, think of that. Do not falter now. As her husband, what may you not have at your command!"

"Enough! I have decided long ago to make her my wife, if possible. If not, they are doomed."

He rose and looked out at the lake. From the place where they were hidden he could see the island, and at times some one of the occupants would come out and glance at the shore through the blinding storm of spray.

"Curse the wind!" muttered the disheartened plotter. "If it were not for that we could make a raft. Where do you suppose they hide upon the island?"

"They have a house, probably. You know that the cheva-

lier is one of the most ingenious men in the world. It is a pity that his talents should be lost to the world. I wonder what he would give me to tell him what I know? More than you would, doubtless."

"Take care, Gerard!"

"I have been revolving the matter in my mind," said the half-breed, slowly, "and upon my word I do not know that I could do better than to go to him and let him know all about it. Perhaps I might marry the daughter myself, which would suit me well. I—"

Whatever he meant to say was stopped in its utterance, for the iron hand of the masked chief was at his throat, and he was borne back helplessly upon the sod, where he lay with eyes starting from their sockets, making appeals for mercy by signs.

"Dog; *canaille!*!" screamed the mask. "Do *you* dare to speak of marrying a daughter of a noble house? I will kill you!"

Just in time to save the wretch from a deserved death, passion passed away, and the mask released his hold upon the throat of the villain, who rose to a sitting posture, black in the face, coughing and spitting blood.

"What was that for?" he gasped.

"Death, scoundrel. Do you ask me the question? I have a mind to finish you."

"You may have gone too far already," said Gerard, with his hand upon his knife. "Did you dare to choke me. Look to yourself, for it may make you trouble."

The mask was not in a position to quarrel; he saw that he had, indeed, gone too far. "It was your own fault, Gerard. You ought to know me better than to think I would endure talk of that kind. Be more careful in future."

"You take me by the throat, you choke me like a dog. What care I for your proud blood? If I choose to boast of it, *my* blood is as pure as yours. A French marquis was my father, an Indian queen my mother. Curse you, I am as proud of my blood as you can be!"

"Enough. I was hasty, and should not have done it. Let that suffice."

"It must, perforce. But, let me tell you, the result of this insult may not be what you wish."

"Would you betray me, Gerard?" said the masked man, in a strained voice, with a wicked gleam in his eyes. "No, no. Think better of it. You do not know what the result might be if you were foolish enough to do *that*."

Gerard, fearing to arouse the tiger in this man's blood, said no more, but stood under the shelter of the rock, looking gloomily across the lake. Just then Chenango came out upon the bluff, and cast an anxious glance toward the shore. Then he retired, and they saw him no more.

"What do you think of the runner's statement that he saw a war party of the Oneidas upon the other side of the lake?" said Gerard, gloomily.

"I do not credit it. Neither would it turn me from my design."

"Yet that chief is more to be dreaded than any of the rest, because he has warriors at his call."

"I suppose so. Thanks to the fire, even if the Oneidas come up, it must be upon the other side of the lake."

"True; but what if they have canoes? It is not a long way from the eastern end of the lake to the island."

"Barely ten miles from the point where the runner saw them. Death, if these cursed Indians come in time to break up my plans. This infernal tempest will be my ruin."

"What do you think of the St. Regis notion that this storm will last three days. They all tell the same story."

"They ought to know. We may as well take matters easily and wait our time. It must come, sooner or later."

During the storm they gathered material for rafts from the numberless logs which were floating in the water, and on the afternoon of the third day had prepared two, capable of carrying their whole force. Night came, and the waves began to go down gradually, and at midnight the lake was as calm as if no tempest had ever swept over its surface. Only the floating logs and the blackened stumps standing in the burned forest told where the spirit of destruction had been at work. When the lake became calm, though it was clear moonlight, the masked chief determined to make the assault. One raft, under the charge of Gerard, he sent to the edge of the burned forest, with instructions to make the assault upon the upper side at the sound of the bugle, while he came up in front,

Several determined warriors elected to cross by themselves, upon logs of their own choosing, and these were instructed to scatter themselves along the northern shore of the island, and land at various points. When all was ready they pushed out from the shore, and slowly approached the island. All was still, though every moment the masked chief expected to hear the sound of the death-dealing rifle. But he waited in vain. He knew that the men he was about to attack were no cowards, and it astonished him that they made no sign. The savages, who had not expected to surprise a foe so on their guard, and had paddled up boldly, were astonished at the profound stillness of the place.

"I'm afraid of a trap," said Gerard. "That infernal Epps is no fool."

"Curse him; the St. Regis may roast him to a cinder, for aught I care, along with Captain Austen. Paddle on!"

The men obeyed, and the raft touched the shore, when the chief raised his bugle to his lips, and gave a loud and defiant blast. Not a sound within the island told that any one heard it, though their friends upon the upper end of the island replied by wild yells of savage rage as they landed. The masked chief darted up the bank, leading his men on, but still the defenders made no sign. The leader looked at the half-breed in dismay.

"What does this mean, Louis? Where are the enemy?"

"*Oui.* That is it; where are they? And echo answers. I don't know!"

"This is some trick of that villain Epps. Curse his impudence, he shall pay dearly for this!"

As he spoke he dashed the butt of his rifle heavily upon the earth, and it gave forth a hollow sound. The mask uttered a cry of joy.

"Run to earth, are they? Come about me, men of the St. Regis. Our enemies are *here!*!"

The fierce warriors answered by a yell of approbation, and stamped furiously upon the earth to find the exact spot where it was hollow. Tramping down in this way over the passage which led to the subterranean refuge of Marstowe and his daughter, they found the stone which barred the passage, and knew that they must make an entrance. Some of them cut

down small saplings with their hatchets, with which they made a sort of shovel, and began to dig into the earth which formed the entrance to the place. Thirty men, working even with such inefficient tools, make quick work, and in less than half an hour a passage was opened sufficiently wide to admit the body of a man, just over the flight of steps.

"Aha!" cried the mask. "We shall have them now. Hi, within there! Come out and talk to me."

"Do you promise to let me return if your terms do not suit us?" said a voice, which sounded strangely hollow in the depths of the cavern.

"Ay," replied the mask. "We can afford to be generous in that respect. You are caught like rats in a trap."

"Then I will come out," said the same voice, and Captain Austen appeared upon the steps below, carrying a torch.

"What would you have?" he said.

A howl of rage from the savages above told that they recognized him, and the part he had taken in their various repulses of the past few days. But their rage was still more loudly expressed when Bill Epps appeared at his side.

"Good-evening," he said, pleasantly, nodding round the circle of wild faces peering in at the hole above him. "Nice kind of surprise party, this is. The old man is glad to see you."

"You take it coolly, Bill Epps," said Gerard. "Perhaps we may change that."

"I'd rather you wouldn't, boys," said Bill. "What do you want with us?"

"You must surrender."

"Surrender! What fur? All friends here, ain't we?"

"Good friends enough, as far as most friendships go. We think so much of you and your friends that we want to see you all up here."

"We can't come."

"Then we must fetch you."

"That's about it. You see, we are bashful down here, and we really can't come out. We'd a durn sight ruther stay whar we be, ef you'd jest ez lieve."

"Enough nonsense," said the mask, sternly. "You must yield, or take the consequences."

"I reckon we'd have to take them anyhow, so I guess we'll stay whar we be. I reckon we'll make it right lively for you, too."

Seeing several of the savages leveling their weapons, the two foresters darted back and awaited the struggle.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MASK REMOVED.

THE gallant attitude of the two brave men somewhat astonished the St. Regis, who had not expected to be braved by men who seemed to be in their power. But it roused all that was savage in their fierce natures, and they began to drop into the passage through the opening. Two rifles cracked, and in a second's space two souls had gone to judgment. The savages were now crowded into the narrow space, and Austen, backed by Bill Epps, stood in the doorway at the top of the stairs, and sent four shots from his long-barreled pistols into their crowded ranks. Shrieks for mercy, groans of pain, and shouts of vengeful import, rung through the cavern. Up to this time, no one had showed himself except Austen and Epps. The guide would not trust himself with a pistol, a weapon in which he had no faith, but loaded them as fast as they were discharged, answering the shouts of the St. Regis by a stentorian cry. But seeing the havoc which the gallant young man was making among his Indians, the masked chief shouted to them to rush on and avenge their fallen comrades. But they met an enemy who did not fear them. Standing in the doorway, with Bill Epps at his side, the captain fought for life. His weapon was a long-bladed rapier, the property of Marstowe, in the use of which he was an adept, and which he swept from side to side. When he stretched out his long arm a shriek of pain was sure to follow. In that cramped space it was impossible for the Indians to advance more than three abreast, and these were so crowded that they had scarcely room to use their weapons.

Bill Epps, holding a heavy hatchet in his hand, ably seconded the efforts of his superior, and the Indians in front would gladly have backed out of a troublesome scrape if their companions in the rear, at present cut off from danger, would have permitted it. They crowded their unhappy comrades upon the blade of Austen and the deadly hatchet of Epps, in spite of their efforts to recede. It was the old struggle of the many and the few, like "Hafed and his Ghebers" in the narrow pass. One by one the Indians dropped, while the two brave men stood unwounded, disputing the narrow pass. The masked chief would have pressed his way to the front, but found it impossible, on account of the crowd in the passage.

"Yield! yield!" he cried, over the heads of his diminishing band. "If you kill any of my men, expect no mercy."

"Past praying for, the old man thinks," roared Epps, striking down a burly savage who was pressing them hard. "Call off yer hounds or we'll make mince-meat of yer hull party."

The Indians behind began to find that their friends were having trouble, and were making frantic efforts to get forward, but in vain. Seeing that the two foresters were making a determined resistance, the chief called off his men, and they climbed rather hastily out of the passage, followed by the derisive shouts of Hungry Bill.

"Yah! yah! yah! yip! yip! yip!" he yelled. "How'd ye like it? Caught like rats in a trap, ar' we? Hoo! The old man ain't dead yit. Made it warm fur 'em that time, didn't we?"

"Whew!" said Austen, drawing a long breath. "Hot; I should think so. What's the next thing on the programme, I wonder?"

The masked chief again appeared at the opening and called out to them in a loud voice and Austen responded.

"This is utter foolishness," said the mask; "why not give up at once? I offer you good quarter."

"Thank you," said Austen. "You are very kind, but really we can not find it in our hearts to take the kind of quarter you will give us."

"Will you not trust to my honor?"

"No, thank you. I have not the slightest faith in your possession of that attribute."

"Then you will not give up."

"Certainly not."

"Then ask the man who calls himself Marstowe to come forward. I will treat with him."

"By no means," replied Austen. "I am the only one you can treat with."

"Let me ask you a single question. Is Perdita dead?"

"If she is not, it is no fault of yours," said Austen. "And if I ever meet you upon any spot of ground on earth where we can cross swords, I will make you repent that dastardly shot."

"Dastardly!"

"Worse than that. None but a *coward* would aim a ball at the breast of a woman."

"Fool! I meant it for you. But, we have said enough. I give you until daylight to make up your mind what you will do. When light appears, we will have you out of that, if we have to burrow like rats after you."

"Good; you shall have a chance to burrow," said Austen. "I bid you good-night."

The masked chief retired, and for four hours Austen stood guard at the doorway, starting up at every sound, ready to dispute the passage as before. But no assault was made until the light of day began to pour into the opening the Indians had made. Bill Epps, who had been sleeping on the hard earth just behind Austen, started up and rubbed his eyes.

"Any one stirring yet, cap?" he said.

"Not yet. At least I have heard no one. What do you say to preparing a little surprise for our worthy friends?"

"As how?" said Bill.

Austen said something in a low tone, at which he laughed and ran out into the passage. In a moment he returned holding his powder-horn in his hand and dropping a train along the ground, taking care to avoid the blood. He had hardly done so when the tramp of many feet announced that the Indians were awake and preparing for the assault. Bill Epps was down upon his knees with a laugh upon his face, lighting a bit of dry punk. He had just succeeded in doing so when the Indians began to drop through the opening, this

time headed by four or five riflemen, so as to meet the defenders upon their own terms.

"Now!" cried Austen.

Bill Epps dropped the piece of punk upon the end of the train. A hissing serpent was seen to run into the passage and a blinding flash lit up the place. Bill had scattered powder in various places in the passage and led a train from it to the spot where he stood. There was not enough of it to make much of an explosion, but in that close place sufficient to make it uncomfortably warm for any one who was unfortunate enough to be caught in the trap. Yells of pain and rage announced that the fellows did not relish their reception, and in the midst of the confusion the masked chief darted in and rushed up the stairs. The rest followed, but when they gained the first room not a soul was to be seen, and their passage was barred by a strong wooden door, from which the muzzles of a pair of rifles protruded in rather a poky manner. The defenders had not been idle during the storm, and had built up a strong door calculated to resist an assault for a considerable time.

"Curse them," said the mask. "They are prepared for us at every point. Ha!"

A rifle cracked and ploughed a long furrow in his shoulder, giving him intense pain and irritating him almost to madness. Dashing back into the passage, he gave an order to the Indians which cleared the cavern in a moment, and the sound of axes could be heard above.

"I know what that means," said the guide. "We ain't got long to tarry. You see how long the durned door will stand it now."

In ten minutes the Indians reappeared, and peeping through his loop-hole, the captain saw that they carried in their hands a section of a small tree, from which they had lopped the branches at convenient lengths for handles, so that ten men could lift it on a side. When they appeared upon the stairs they commenced running, and then:

Crash!

The door trembled and creaked, and with a sigh for the friends he never hoped to see again, Laurence Austen laid down his rifle and took his sword in his hand. Again that

crash came, and the door came down with a loud noise, and over it poured the whole band of St. Regis, or what was left of them, mad, desperate. Both Bill Epps and the captain fought with the fury of despair, but what could they do against so many? They were borne down, bound hand and foot, and would have been slain upon the spot had not the half-breed shouted to the braves to reserve them for a worse fate. The masked chief sprung forward to look for his other prisoners, but nowhere could he see them. Search where he would, he could find no trace of the two for whom he had dared so much. He came back frantic.

"Look you, young man. I have a few words to say to you, and see that you answer them promptly. Where is Perdita; where is the Chevalier Marly, otherwise called Marstowe?"

"How can I tell?" replied the captain, with a light laugh.
"Impossible to say."

"You lie, I believe."

"Do you? Impossible to say. Do you know where they are gone, Bill?"

"How should I know?" said Bill, in the same tone. "They ain't here, I reckon."

"I will find a way to open your mouths upon the subject. Drag them out, braves of the St. Regis. We will make them atone for the blood which has been shed."

"You have us in your power, and of course you have the privilege of doing as you please," said Austen. "But no torture you can inflict will avail you. I know what to expect, but I will endure it, for the sake of the sweet girl you would have murdered. Thank God, she is safe from you, whatever may come to me."

"Where is the chief?" demanded a savage, thrusting his painted face close to that of Austen. "Dog of a Yengee, speak. Where is Chenango, that child of the bad spirit, who has brought sorrow into the St. Regis lodges?"

"You bet he has," said Bill. "Come, capt'in. They can't hurt the gal now. Tell the pizen snake how she got away."

"You may, if you like."

"Waal, I don't mind. They went away in the boat jest afore you come, and left us to take care of you. We agreed

that you shouldn't follow 'em till mornin'. We did our darnedest, didn't we, boss?"

The masked chief did not reply, but made a gesture of fierce meaning, and the two prisoners were dragged out into the open air, surrounded by the demons who had taken them, making the air vocal with their cries. Scarcely a man among them who had not a personal wrong to avenge, for the fireworks which Bill had gotten up had burned many of them, and others had lost personal friends in the struggles of the past week. They tied them to stunted saplings, facing each other, and then the ferocious band began one of those wild scenes which often follow a capture of this kind. They danced wildly about the captives, uttering a strange chant and sounding the death cry, execrating them in the names of slain relatives and friends.

Bill Epps remained tied in an uncomfortable position to the sapling, following the motions of the savages with his eyes and waiting for new acts of violence. He had hoped for aid from a quarter of which Austen had not thought, since Chenango had disappeared as soon as the storm ended.

But, he had not given sufficient credit to the gratitude of the savage hero. Chenango had not forgotten them, and while the Indians were beginning new indignities, a lithe form darted suddenly from the woods, cut the bonds upon the hands of the captives, and gave them weapons, and then stood up like a rock, to receive the united rush of the determined foe, shouting the war-cry of the Oneidas! As the cry sounded over the lake, to the utter surprise of the masked chief, as well as the St. Regis, an answering shout was heard from every side, and a strong band of Oneidas darted from the thicket around, and rushed upon the astounded St. Regis. Taken by surprise, they offered but a feeble resistance. Some were cut down, the balance taken captive. The half-breed was killed. The masked chief, attempting to escape, was brought down by a hatchet, desperately wounded. When the strife was over, they found him lying upon his side close to the water's edge, breathing hard.

"Let the Chevalier Marly and his daughter come to me," he said, feebly. "That is, if they are here."

"I will call them," replied Austen, who heard the request.

The old man who had made the island his home came forward, followed by Perdita.

"Take off my mask," said the wounded man, in the same weak tone. "It has served its purpose, and can do no more."

Bill Epps cut the leathern straps which bound the mask behind, and pulled it off. Marly looked into the face, and staggered back with a look of horror.

"God of heaven; my nephew, Edward!"

"Yes, Chevalier Marly, Marquis of Duchay, I am your nephew, Edward. What does it matter? I followed you for the sake of the inheritance which, while you were not known to be dead, rested in abeyance since my uncle's death. I sought you out in Montreal, but you escaped me. I heard of the recluse who lived here alone, and I sought you out. My villainy has recoiled upon my own head. If you were dead, I could claim the title."

"I thought it might be you," said Marly, sadly. "But, this distortion of your shoulder deceived me."

"A part of my disguise. I would have married Perdita, and gained the place I sought in France. That failing, I would have slain you both. My power among the St. Regis enabled me to collect this band, but I have failed. I die as I have lived: a desperate end to a desperate life. You may yet have trouble before you sit in your castle at Duchay."

With these words, he gasped and died. Marly yet kneeled beside him, looking down into the set face, which showed the marks of a riotous life, though proud and noble.

Marly looked up at last. "My friends," he said, "you marvel to see me here. I will explain. My brother was Marquis of Duchay, and hated me. For a crime of which I was never guilty I was forced to leave France, and make my home in America. With that crime unexplained I can not return, and it was the knowledge of this which gave Edward the power over me. He was an Indian agent of the Governor of Canada, a bad-hearted man. He held the proofs of my innocence, but where they are I do not know."

"Search him," said Austen.

Bill Epps passed his hand over the clothing of the dead man until he felt something under the coat upon his breast. He opened the coat and did not find it, but sewed to the inside of

his waistcoat was a leathern pocket-book, which Bill cut loose and gave to Marly, who opened it with trembling hands. He saw within a folded paper, which he opened hastily. His eye brightened as he ran his gaze over the contents.

"Gentlemen," said he, "my avowed crime was political. With this in my hand I can face my sovereign and demand my birthright at his hands. No more the nameless outcast, fleeing from a shadow, but as Alphonse Marly, Marquis of Duchay, I greet you. Perdita, night is over; day has come to us!"

She threw herself upon his neck, weeping for joy. It was a delightful moment; even the stern Indian was touched, and Austen turned away his head. He was glad they were happy, glad of her honors, although it set up such a bar between them.

"Friends all," continued Marly. "I am so bare of thanks that I can hardly speak to you. But the chief is the man to whom you two owe your lives. When we thought he had fled from us, he had gone to bring us aid. He knew that his men would be at a certain place at the time he could reach it, and they had canoes. He left you without explanation, and found them. We met them on the lake, and were captured, as we thought, by our enemies. What was our joy to hear the welcome voice of Chenango! Good fortune aided us, and, shielded by the thick woods upon the eastern end of the island, we reached it unobserved. Spies were sent out, who came back to report you tied to the stake awaiting torture. The rest you know."

Under guard of the band of Oneidas they bade farewell to the island upon which they had lived so long, and passed away down the beautiful valley of the Mohawk. Bill Epps remained with them, for the business which had brought Captain Laurence to this place was settled by the meeting with Chenango. The captain walked by Perdita's side, and in the downcast eyes and burning cheeks he read the story of her love. And her father, though a proud man once, loved his daughter too truly to break her heart, and when they sailed for Europe to claim their own, Perdita was madam Austen.

Bill Epps and Chenango followed them as far as Albany, and when the sailing "packet" swung out from the wharf, they saw the beautiful woman for whose sake they had periled

much, standing on the deck, waving her handkerchief to them. Bill waved his mangy cap with one hand, while he covered his eyes with the other.

"Good-by, little gal," he muttered. "The sweetest woman on the univarsal airth. Come, Chenango."

As the packet rounded the headland, the forest men turned and went back to their woodland life, to stay until the Master called them.

THE END.

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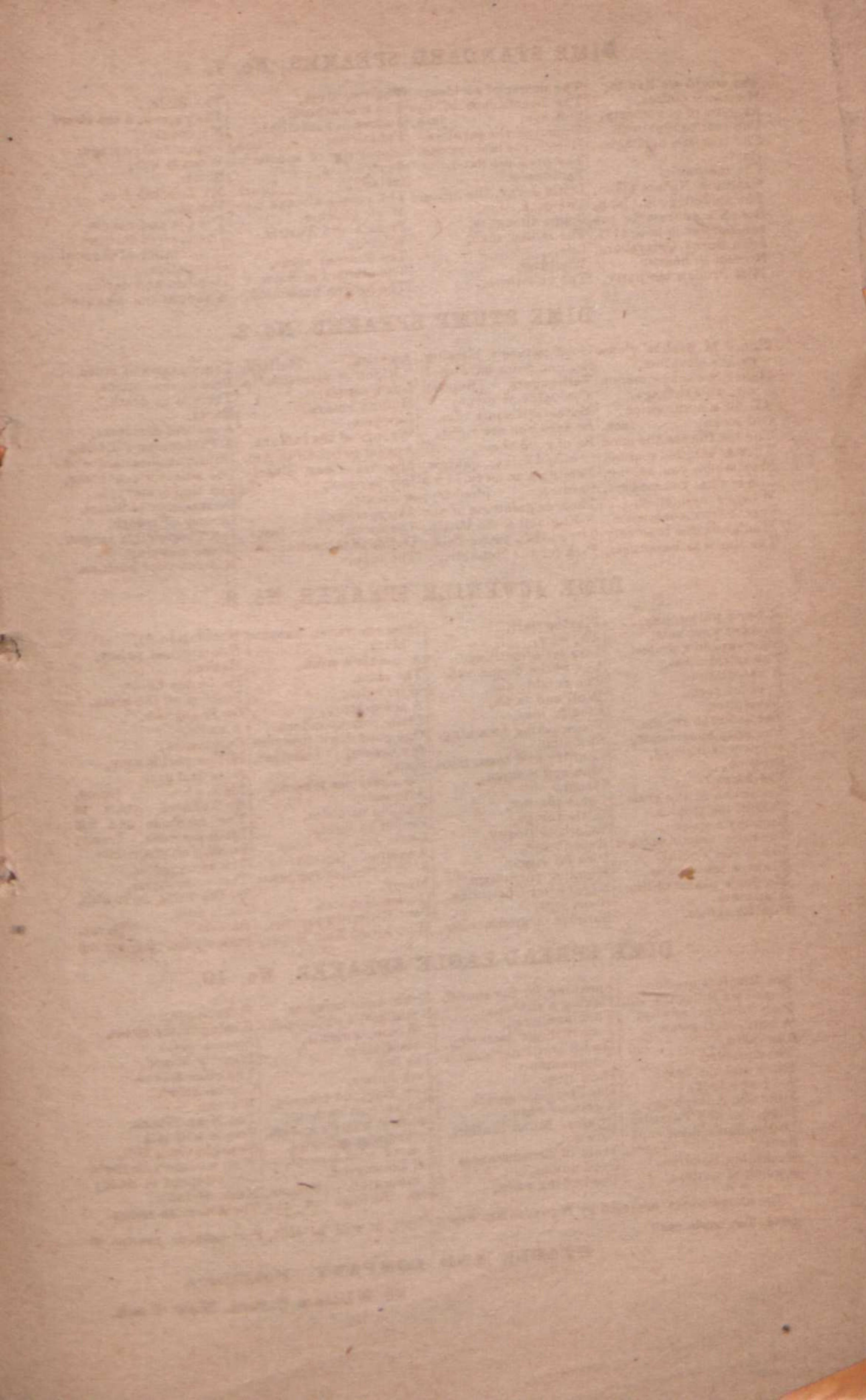
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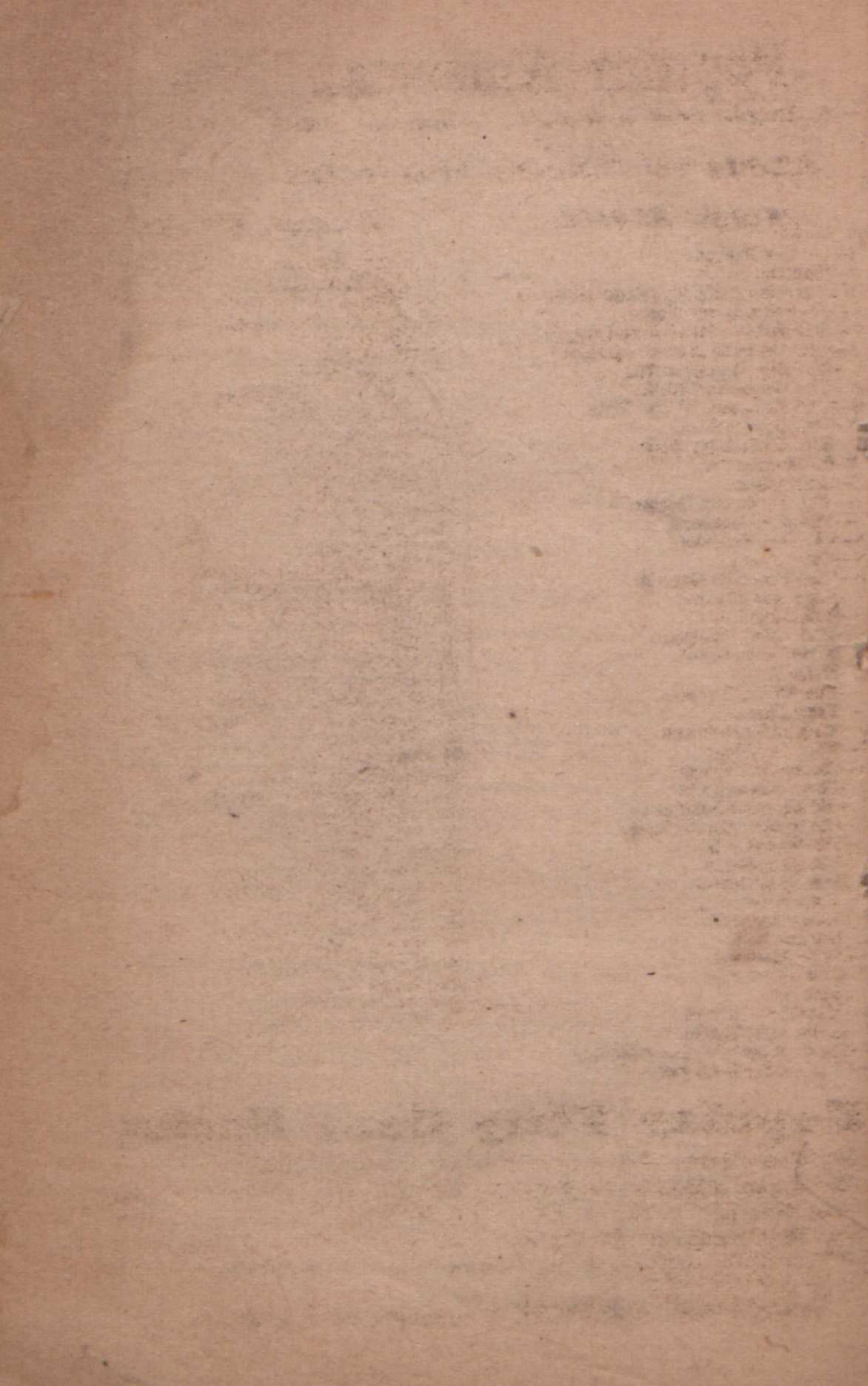
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